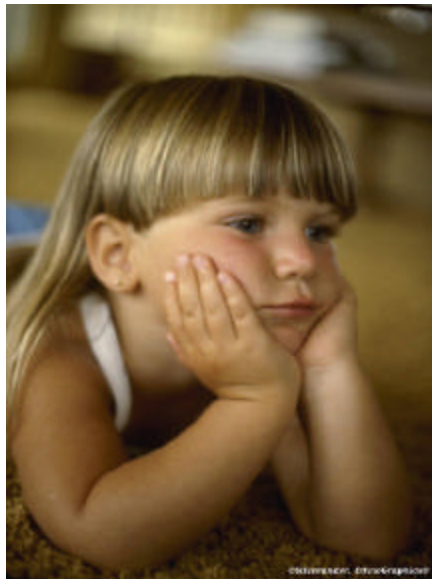


Chapter Nine



Permanency

- 1. Have there been notable changes in the area of permanency data in the past three years in the state? Identify and discuss any factors affecting the changes noted and the effects on permanency for children in foster care in the state.**

All notable trends are discussed in response to Questions 2 through 11 of this section.

- 2. Identify and discuss any issues raised by the data regarding the composition of the state's foster care population, rates of admissions and discharges, and changes in this area. Discuss the state's ability to ensure that the children who enter foster care in the state are only those children whose needs for protection and care cannot be met in their own homes.**

I. Overview

A combination of Washington law, court processes, and CA's policy ensures that only those children who cannot safely remain at home are in foster care.

Courts must determine if reasonable efforts have been made to prevent or eliminate the need to remove a child from his or her home. Reasonable efforts may include: case management, Family Preservation Services, home support services, counseling, drug or alcohol treatment, transportation, visiting nurse services, and other state-provided services.

For children in out-of-home placement, the court must also determine that continued placement in the parents' home is contrary to the child's welfare. Following federal law, Washington ensures that there has been a court decision on this question within 180 days of placement and a permanency planning hearing between nine and twelve months after placement.

II. Program and Policy Information

CA provides many services to families of children who are at risk for out-of-home placement. The intent of these programs is to help prevent placement, and to strengthen families. Services may include, but are not limited to: Family Group Conferences, Family Preservation Services, Intensive Family Preservation Services, Family Reconciliation Services, and Alternative Response System services. Services are described in further detail in Chapter Five: Service Array and Development.

Kids Come First Action Agenda (KCF)

In 2000, a highly publicized child death occurred following a child being reunified with her mother. It was this tragic incident that led to the adoption of the KCF Action Agenda, which places increased emphasis on safety planning and on kinship care placements. Unfortunately, not enough time has lapsed to be able to determine what affect, if any, the KCF Action Agenda has had on data trends.

The Risk Assessment and Reunification Assessment developed as part of the KCF Action Agenda also help ensure sound decision-making about children admitted to and discharged from foster care. (Refer to Chapter Eight: Safety, for additional information).

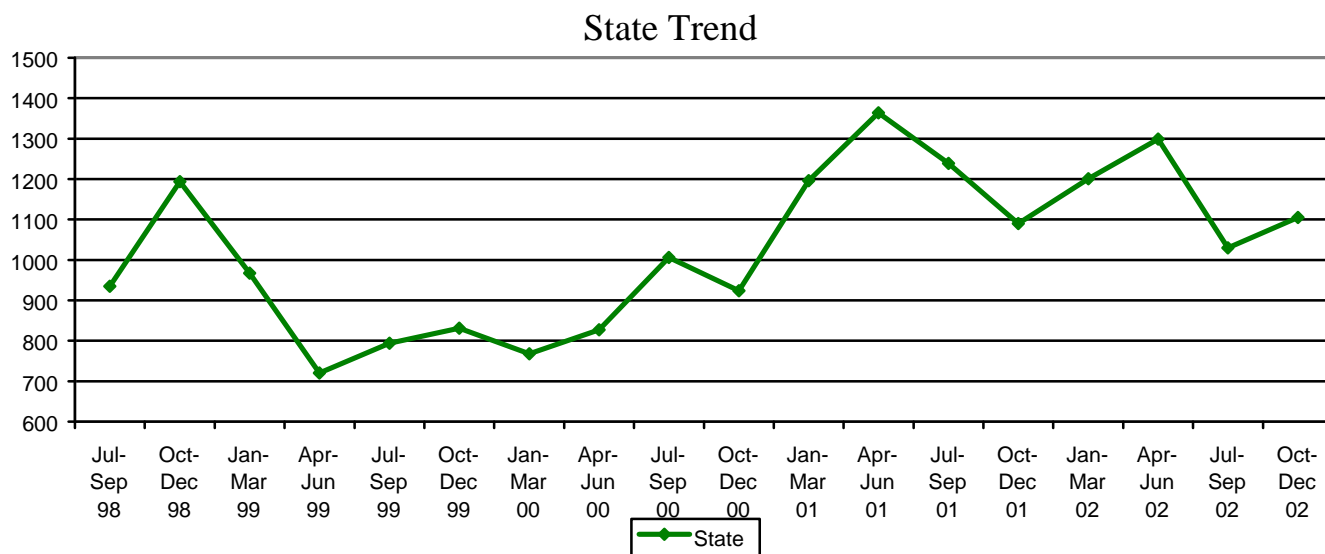
Child Protection Teams

CA has demonstrated the commitment to engaging community experts in the shared decision-making process required for effective child protection through mandates specified in Executive Order 95-04 regarding the use of community Child Protection Teams (CPT). CPT's review cases that are considered to be at high risk. The team helps to decide whether to remove children from their homes and whether to return children home from foster care. These teams also help identify services that may benefit the family.

Every local office has at least one CPT that meets on a regular basis. The teams are comprised of a minimum of four professionals invested in the interests of child welfare, who are not employed by CA. Participants may include, but are not limited to, law enforcement officers, physicians, mental health and substance abuse practitioners and other mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. CA policy requires the utilization of CPT's for decision-making about child placement in any of the following situations:

- Moderately high and high risk cases involving children age six or younger,
- Cases where professional disagreement exists about the risk of serious injury,
- All moderate or high-risk cases prior to return home or dismissal of court ordered dependency of a child age six or younger,
- Cases opened on the bases of imminent harm, or
- Any complex case which may benefit from such consultation.

Chart 1. Number of Children's Cases Staffed with Child Protection Teams



(Source: Children's Administration, Monthly Trend Report, August 2003)

The number of CPT's conducted statewide is tabulated by regional hand count. The statewide count of cases staffed with community CPT's for the most recent fiscal quarter was 1,105. This count falls short of the performance agreement target of 1,255 staffings.

Court Appointed Special Advocates

Cases are also reviewed by Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA's) who are also known as Guardians ad Litem (GAL) in 33 of Washington's 39 counties and in the Spokane Indian Tribal Court. These volunteers provide an independent assessment of a family and report to the court.

CASA's are trained volunteers charged with the responsibility of investigating the child and family situation and acts on behalf of the best interests of the child. CASA's are appointed in dependency cases in juvenile court.

While CA does not administer the GAL program, CA takes an active role in seeking to expand and enhance both volunteer and paid GAL programs. CA has a longtime commitment to work with partners to achieve quality GAL representation for abused and neglected children in court.

Table 1. Washington State CASA Program Statistics

Washington State CASA Program Statistics*		
Year	Active CASA Volunteers	Number of Children Served
1999	1357	5525
2000	1645	6485
2001	1915	6568
2002	2121	6267

(Source: Washington State CASA Association)

Table 1 above reflects the number of children served by CASA's between 1999 and 2002. Children that may alternatively be served by attorney GAL's or other individuals appointed by the court are not reflected in this table.

From 2000 to 2002, the number of CASA volunteers has increased by 28%. There were slightly fewer children served by CASA volunteers last year than the year before. According to the Washington State CASA there are several reasons why this may have occurred. Those reasons include:

- Volunteers increased by nearly 9% in the last year resulting in increased training by volunteer coordinators.
- New volunteers were not able to carry full caseloads until training/mentoring was completed.
- The National CASA Association tightened standards for CASA caseload ratios (3 to 1).
- A number of new programs required significant start up time before serving children.
- Aside from the national caseload standards, several programs addressed other quality assurance issues.
- Some local programs reduced funding for volunteer coordinators.

This past year, an estimated \$4.0 million dollars was awarded to the statewide CASA programs. The statewide association has an annual budget of \$600,000 in addition to the budget for local programs. Approximately 93% of the funding for CASA programs are public funds. Other sources of funding includes foundations, United Way, fundraisers, churches and corporations.

Although the number of CASA's continues to increase, there are still not enough to represent all children in out-of-home care. According to the Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, there were 9,148 children in care on the last day of FFY 2002. According to the

data provided by the Washington State CASA Association, there were 6,267 children served by CASA's in 2002. This would leave 2,881 children in out-of-home care without CASA representation. In addition, there may be children who have been reunified with their parents and are in the home on an in-home dependency. The children who have in-home dependencies are not included in this number.

Data Trends

Admission and Discharge Rates

Based on the Washington Child and Family Service Review Data Profile, the admission of children into foster care has steadily decreased over the past three years, as reflected in Table 2, below. The number of children discharged decreased even more dramatically between FFY 2000 and FFY 2002. This decline in the number of admissions and discharges has resulted in the overall population of children in out-of-home care steadily increasing over the three-year period.

Table 2. Admissions and Discharge Rates

	Admissions	Discharges	Net Change
Federal Fiscal Year 2000	7,590	7,129	+461
Federal Fiscal Year 2001	7,273	6,438	+835
Federal Fiscal Year 2002	6,940	6,240	+700

(Source: Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, March 27, 2003)

Net Changes in Children in Care During the Year

Table 3. Net Change in Number of Children in Placement

	Children in care of 1st day of year	Children in care on last day of year	Net change over the year
FFY 2000	8,484	8,945	+461
FFY 2001	8,266	9,101	+835
FFY 2002	8,448	9,148	+700

(Source: Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile, March 27, 2003)

The Washington Child and Family Services Review Data Profile indicates a change in the total number of children in care, which is not congruent with the state data. In the data profile, it would be conceivable to think that the number of children in care on the last day of one year (e.g. 8,945 on the last day of the year 2000) would be very close to the children in care on the first day of the following year (e.g. 8,266 on the first day of the year 2001). Since the window of opportunity for movement in or out of care is only 24 hours, the number of children in care should be fairly close, rather than having a difference of 679 children. This raises some questions about the validity of the data submitted to AFCARS, with which the state has identified some concerns.

Children in Care Less Than 60 Days

As seen in Table 4, nearly 50% of the children placed in Washington exit care in the first 60 days. This patterns tends to skew the data in terms of those children that are in term for longer periods of time. For that reason, the trend of children in care more than 60 days is a much clearer picture of the number of children in care over time.

Table 4. Number of Days from Placement to Exit for Children Placed During the Time Period

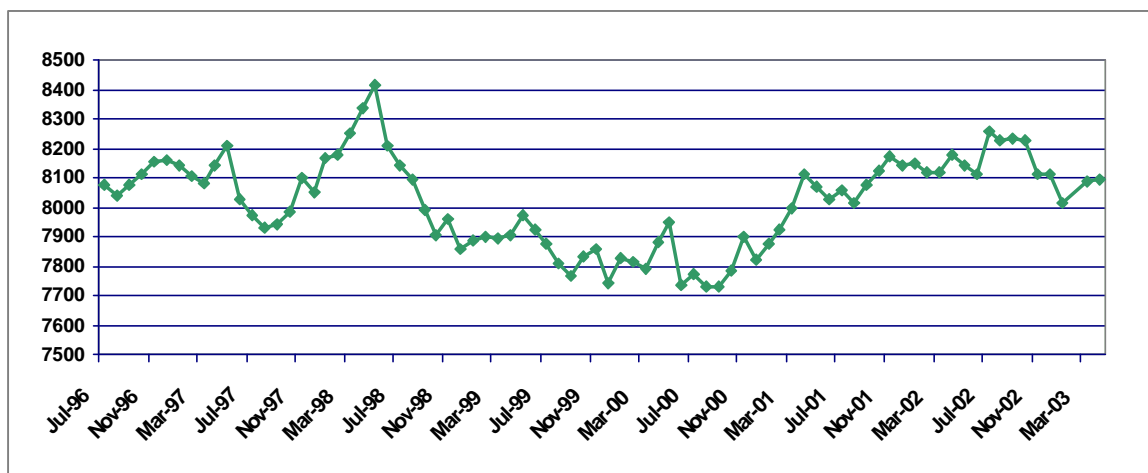
Number of Days from Placement to Exit	April 2002 - March 2003	April 2001 - March 2002
	(12 Month Average)	(12 Month Average)
1-5 Days	32.2%	34.7%
6-30 Days	9.7%	10.1%
31-60 Days	4.6%	4.3%
61-180 Days	Not presented because children placed in March 2003 have only been in placement for 90 days, so data is not comparable.	9.2%
181-360 Days		7.1%
Over 360 Days		7.2%
Still Placed		27.3%

(Source: Children's Administration Data Management Unit)

Number of Children in Out-of-Home Care

The state's data bears out the trend of an increase in the total number of children in care, but the increase is not as dramatic as the federal data indicates. Chart 2 below reflects the statewide trend of the number of children in out-of-home care longer than 60 days.

Chart 2. Total Number of Children in Out-of-Home Care Greater Than 60 Days



(Source: Children's Administration, Performance Report, 2002)

In the 2002 Performance Report, CA reported that there were approximately 8,000 new placements during the year, and 7,900 exits from out-of-home care. It is strongly suspected that the variance between the state and federal data is related mostly to issues within data from the information system, rather than practice issues. Specifically, the way discharges from care and in-home dependencies have been handled in CAMIS and subsequently reported to the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) may have skewed the data profile. The AFCARS Review, conducted in June 2003, identified some inaccuracies in reporting discharge dates in general and particularly for children who have been returned home under an in-home dependency.

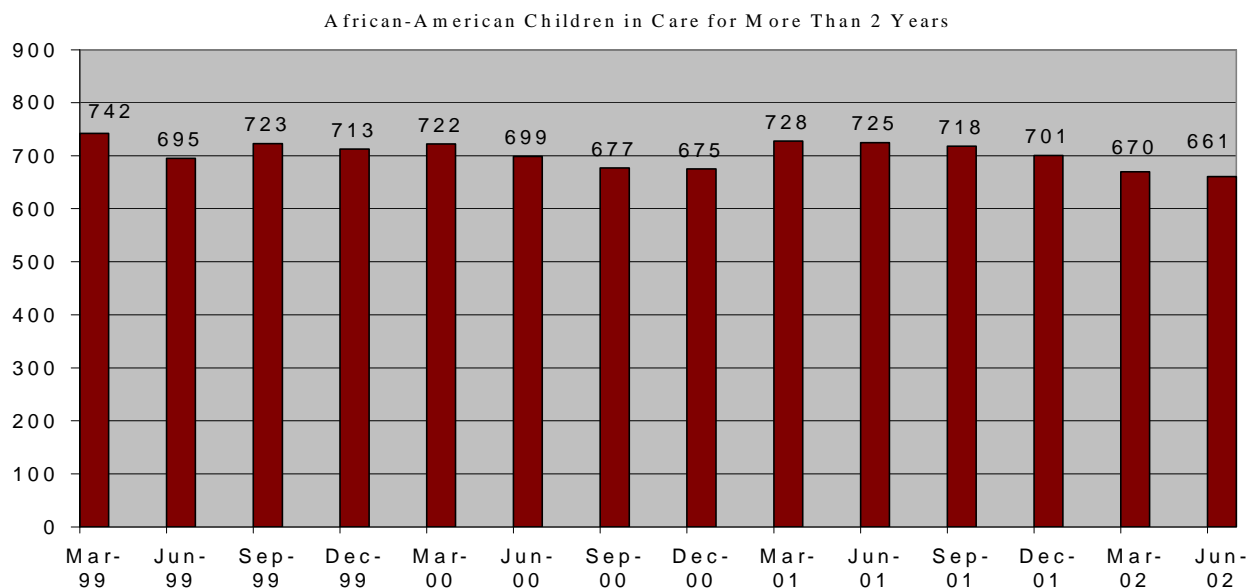
CA has implemented several activities to improve data. The activities are specifically aimed at closing placement records that have been left open. These closures were not reflected in the AFCARS submissions because the extraction logic was not using transaction dates as the basis for data submitted, but was instead using the effective dates of the closures. In essence, this means that a child who left placement during a previous reporting period, but whose discharge was not documented in the system until the following reporting period, was not submitted to AFCARS as required. This programming logic is being rewritten, but is not yet completed. Once it is rewritten and adequate testing has been done, the state may need to resubmit the prior three years AFCARS submissions to get a more accurate view of foster care population.

Population Characteristics

Minority children, and more specifically African-American children, are over-represented in foster care in Washington state and nationwide. Moreover, these children tend to remain in out-of-home care longer than their Caucasian counterparts. CA has made concerted efforts to address this inequity.

In fiscal year 2003, CA demonstrated the lowest number of African-American children in care more than two years since the agency began tracking the measure in 1999. The number of African-American children in care has declined from 742 in 1999 to 626 in 2003. Chart 3, below, reflects the number of African-American children in care (for more than 2 years), by quarter.

Chart 3. African-American Children in Care for More than Two Years



(Source: Children's Administration, Performance Report, 2002)

For children in care more than two years, African-American and Native American children are more likely to be placed with relatives than Caucasian children. Out of all African-American children in care, 31.9% were placed with relatives. Out of all Native American children in care, 29.8% were placed with relatives. Out of all Caucasian children placed in care, 23.7% were placed with relatives.

Some of these children in relative care are known to be in a permanent relative placement with a written long-term relative agreement in place. However, due to information system limitations, these permanent plan completions cannot currently be tracked in CAMIS. So, these children continue to show in the data system as children awaiting permanency, even though their permanent plans have actually been completed. The legal and placement module of CAMIS is being revised and this is one issue that will be addressed in the new model. However, the impact of this issue and the degree to which it may have an effect on our understanding of disproportionality overall is unknown.

There has also been a decline in the number of minority children, age birth to three, who have

been legally free for greater than one year. This number has decreased from 161 children at the end of FY 2000 to a low of 112 children at the end of FY 2002. However, the number of children legally free for over a year increased again during FY 2003 to the current 142. One explanation for this increase may be the intentional delays in adoption finalizations, which have been requested by adoptive families. The requested delays would allow the adoptive families to finalize the adoption in 2003 and benefit from federal tax incentives, which became effective January 1, 2003. It is expected that this number will steadily decline over the next year as these children are moved to permanency and adoptions are finalized.

Table 5. Population Diversity in King County

2000 Census			
Population	Number	Percent of Total Population in King County	Percent of children in placement
Total Population	1,737,034	100.0%	
Total Hispanics (of any race)	95,242	5.5%	11.4%
Caucasian	1,315,507	75.7%	47.7%
Black or African American	93,875	5.4%	28.7%
American Indian & Alaskan Native	15,922	.9%	7.8% (Native American)
Asian	187,745	10.8%	2.8%
Hawaiian & Pacific Islander	9,013	.5%	Included as part of the Asian population count
Other/Multiracial/Unreported	44,473	2.6%	13.1%

(Source: Census 2000)

** Note that the percent of total population may equal over 100%, as the total number of persons reporting Hispanic ethnicity (of any race) was included in the percentage. Percentages of children in placement are based upon FY 2002.

Racially, King County has a higher level of diversity in the population than the remainder of Washington. Forty-five percent of all African Americans in the state of Washington live in King County, as do 49% of all Asian and Pacific Islanders. Census information reflects the growth trend in the non-Caucasian population in King County, which continues to grow faster than the Caucasian population. Table 5 shows the population breakout for King County.

III. Initiatives

Kidscreen Profiles

CA is working on a plan to develop child profiles across the state. The profiles will be developed through information obtained by the use of the Kidscreen tools. The intention of the pro-

files is to assist both urban and rural areas of the state in the identification and development of services, which would be responsive to the particular needs of children in care for each area. (Refer to Chapter Ten: Child and Family Well-being for additional information).

Families for Kids Partnership

As mentioned in previous questions throughout this assessment, Washington has a statewide initiative focused on issues of permanency. Washington's Families for Kids Partnership (FFKP) brings together public and private agencies, the courts, attorneys, special advocates, Tribes, corporations and others to reform the foster/adoption system. The partnership began in 1994, and has two goals:

- 1) Eliminate the backlog of legally free children waiting for permanent families and reform the system so no more children must wait; and
- 2) Increase community awareness and involvement in meeting the needs of children in the foster care system.

Among the results of the partnership so far is a dramatic increase in the number of children being adopted. Adoptions have doubled and remained high; and for the past three years, over 1,000 children each year have been adopted out of foster care.

In 1998, a statewide coalition of more than 300 individuals from 90 public and private agencies, tribes and organizations developed the *Washington Permanency Framework: Five-year Plan for Ensuring Permanent Families for Children in Foster Care*. The Framework focuses on closing the gap between current outcomes and the - yet unachieved - vision of providing every child with a family to call his own.

As partners, the stakeholders are assuming responsibility for carrying on the reform efforts. The governor and legislature are resoundingly supportive of permanency improvements. Individuals, businesses and communities are also involved in helping.

Families For Kids Partnership (FFKP) is funded through the Stuart Foundation, by the CA, Casey Family Programs, Children's Home Society of Washington, the Office of the Administrator of the Courts, and the Northwest Children's Fund.

IV. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

Strengths

- Community Child Protection Teams (CPT's) are available to all offices and review cases that are considered high risk and help decide whether or not to remove children from their home and whether or not to return children home after placement in out-of-home care.

- In addition to the policy safeguards listed above, a number of other services and programs are used to prevent out-of-home placement. Those services include: Family Group Conferences when used as a preventative intervention; Family Preservation Services and Intensive Family Preservation Services; Alternate Response System (ARS) providing assistance to families that are considered “low risk”; and the Family Reconciliation Services (FRS) voluntary program for families in conflict.

Challenges

- As new requirements have been added to the legal and placement module of CAMIS, the modules have become very complex. As a result, there is some concern that workers are not always inputting the information correctly and this may be affecting the data. CA is working to develop a plan to revise and improve the Legal and Placement module, but such changes often require a significant amount of time to complete.

Promising Practice

In order to provide stable, nurturing and permanent homes as quickly as possible for children who are placed in out-of-home care, CA’s strategic plan for 2003-05 includes strategies to engage the community in supporting families and improving the foster care system by working to:

- Support the activities of the Washington Permanency Summit (Families for Kids Partnership);
- Focus on early identification of relatives who may be important resources for children;
- Provide substance abuse treatment for birth parents on demand; and
- Reduce the disproportionality of Native American and African-American children in foster care.

3. How well is the state able to ensure that children are placed in the types of placements that are the most family-like and most appropriate for their individual needs, both at the time of initial entry into foster care and throughout their stay in foster care?

I. Overview

CA's policy requires children to be placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting that meets the child's needs when out-of-home placement is necessary. Generally, this is best accomplished through placement with a relative, which is the preferred placement option. Over the past six years, CA has implemented strategies that have resulted in an increase in relative placements. Strategies include early identification of appropriate relatives by using specifically assigned staff to search for relatives and complete relative home studies. Family group conferencing has also led to an increase in relative placement.

CA's ability to place the child in the least restrictive, most family-like setting is addressed in the Individual Service and Safety Plan (ISSP) which is reviewed by the court every six months.

II. Program and Policy Information

Washington law and CA policy require that when out-of-home placement is necessary, children are placed in the most family-like setting that can meet their needs. The following placement resources are ranked in order from least restrictive (most family-like) to most restrictive (least family-like):

1. Child's biological or adoptive parent;
2. Relative placement (for Native American children extended family members are defined in law or custom of the family's tribe);
3. Foster family care;
4. Group care licensed facility (institutional care).

In addition, Washington state law also calls for the least restrictive and appropriate placements that facilitate continued interaction between parent and child and that siblings be placed together unless there is evidence that doing so would be detrimental to one of the children.

In order to ensure the least restrictive placement, shared decision making is utilized throughout the life of a case in a number of venues: staffings, review hearings, and permanency planning meetings.

In addition, court orders are required for any change of placement into or out of foster or relative care. The federal Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) also ensures children's safety and least restrictive placement when placed out of state with relatives or in foster placement.

Family Group Conferencing/Family Support Meetings

The Family Group Conferencing (FGC) model, in addition to Family Support Meetings, are utilized by CA staff to bring families together to develop solutions and permanent plans for children. These two models have also provided the department with an opportunity to search for additional relatives that may be used as long term placement options.

Foster Care Assessment Program

The Foster Care Assessment Program (FCAP) is a statewide contracted program through Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress and several of its partner agencies. FCAP provides assessments for children who have been in out-of-home care for more than 90 days and who are in need of intensive planning in order to achieve permanency. (Refer to Chapter Ten: Child and Family Well-being for additional information on this program.

Data Trends

Relative Placements

When a child cannot remain in his/her own home, relative placement is the preferred placement option. Relative placements increased from 27.3% in FFY 2000 to 32% in FFY 2002. Over the past six years, CA has implemented strategies to increase relative placements and the state's data shows that 33.4% of children are currently living with relatives. The focus on increasing relative searches and placing children with relatives earlier is evidenced by the dramatic increase in several offices in the state where more than 65% of the children are placed with relatives.

Financial support for relative caregivers is available through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Relative caregivers frequently report the need for more financial assistance for the children in their care. Relative caregivers indicate that the child-only grant provided by TANF is inadequate, and they continue to need help providing basic necessities as well as accessing medical care, affordable housing, and adequate transportation in order to be able to care for their relatives' children. However, CA does provide childcare assistance and some concrete services to support these relative placements. A portion of relatives make the choice to become licensed foster parents in order to be able to receive the financial reimbursement that is provided for foster parents. As of July 2003, there were approximately 2600 relative placements statewide. Of those placements, 459 (or approximately 17%) were in paid relative care. In order for relatives to receive payment, they must become licensed foster parents.

Foster Care Placements

In addition to a focus on relative placement, state resources are designed to ensure that children are placed in the most family-like and most appropriate settings for their individual needs. The Foster Care Improvement Plan (FCIP) as part of the Kids Come First Action Agenda has fo-

cused on the recruitment and retention of family foster homes during the past two years. Family foster homes are used to meet the needs of children who cannot remain at home and for whom a relative resource has not been identified.

An adequate pool of foster homes to meet the needs of children in care is essential. For this reason, CA has emphasized the recruitment of new foster homes and has licensed between 250 and 350 new minority foster homes each year over the past three years and 1,240 to 1,330 total new foster homes each year over the past three years. (Refer to Chapter Seven: Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval, and Recruitment for additional information).

Behavioral Rehabilitation Services (BRS) – In home care, therapeutic foster care, facility care

Behavioral Rehabilitation Services (BRS) is a package of contracted services, first developed in 1994, to *bring services to* the highest need children in the state, rather than the earlier Group Care Program in which *children had to go* to whatever service existed. The BRS package of contracted services is designed to provide an intensity of service to meet the level of need of the individual child and includes facility-based care, therapeutic foster care, and in-home care. An individually tailored service plan is developed based on the needs of the child, and it ensures that the child is served in the least restrictive and most home-like setting possible, since the services can even be brought into the child's own home to meet their needs. BRS contracts include the capacity to serve over 1,000 children, but over 55% of these beds are in therapeutic foster homes or in-home settings, rather than group or facility settings.

Table 1. Number of Children Receiving BRS

	Facility-Based Services (Based on AFCARS submission of group & institutional place- ments)	Therapeutic Foster Home & In-home Services (Estimate)	TOTAL BRS (Based on SSPS 3400 Payments)
September 2000	469	550	1,019
September 2001	558	531	1,089
September 2002	524	643	1,167

(Source: Children's Administration Data Management Unit)

BRS – Facility-based services

At the end of FFY 2000, 469 children were placed in group (or institutional) care and in FFY 2002 524 were placed in group (or institutional) care. Based on the data profile, only 5.8% of Washington's children were placed in group (or institutional) care as compared to 17.6% nationally. We believe this low percentage of children placed in group homes or institutions is the result of the emphasis for many years on developing the least-restrictive placement settings for the children with the highest needs, since approximately 12% of the children in placement receive BRS services.

BRS – Therapeutic foster care & in-home services

CA contracts with private providers for BRS services and the cost is based on the intensity of service provided rather than the placement setting. Due to the way this is documented in the CAMIS system, CA is only able to estimate that approximately 600 children are served in therapeutic foster care and in-home services. The estimate is based on the number of children in group (or institutional) care, who are identified by their social worker in the CAMIS Legal and Placement module by the placement type. This number is subtracted from the number of children receiving a BRS payment. This estimated breakout of BRS placement types can be practically done only as a point-in-time measurement. The CAMIS Legal and Placement Module Design Team is considering whether it will be possible to redesign the module to more accurately identify these placement types. Linkage between the placement and payment system will likely be necessary to do this accurately, however, the resources to link these two modules will not be available for several years.

Out-of-State Placements

BRS contracts for the intensity of services that is required to meet the needs of the highest-need children in facilities and homes located in the State of Washington. Although the contracts include services in the state border communities of Lewiston, Idaho and Portland, Oregon, these communities are considered in-state resources because of their proximity to Washington. Placement in these border resources is often closer in proximity to a child's family than resources with a Washington address.

Twenty-four children are currently placed out-of-state in non-border communities. Only two of these children are placed because their needs cannot be met in Washington; the rest are placed out-of-state to facilitate reunification or for continued connections to families who now reside in other states. Regionally-based contracting and placement decision-making encourages children to be placed close to their families. Statewide coordination of the contracts and placement resources assures that children's needs are met within the state when they cannot be met within the region.

Placement Types

Table 2, below, reflects the total number of children in placement in FY 2002, and the breakout of placement by type.

Table 2. Out-of-Home Placement Statistics

**OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT STATISTICS
JULY 2001 - JUNE 2002**

TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN SERVED IN PLACEMENT - FY 2002			
Total Number of Children Cared for in Out-of-Home Care - FY 2002 Unduplicated (Source: CAMIS)			(approx) 15,000

AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT EACH MONTH			
TYPE OF CARE	PAID PLACEMENT (Source: SSPS)	OTHER PLACEMENT (Source: CAMIS)	TOTAL CHILDREN
FOSTER CARE			
Receiving Care	743		743
DCFS Foster Care	5,098		5,098
Private Agency	1,221		1,221
Relative Placement		2,670	2,670
TOTAL	7,062	2,670	9,732
BEHAVIORAL REHABILITATION SERVICES			
Short Term Group Care	125		125
Ongoing Group Care	1,026		1,026
Ongoing with In-Home/Aftercare	54		54
TOTAL	1,205		1,205
CRISIS RESIDENTIAL SERVICES			
Semi-Secure CRC's	195		195
Secure CRC's	270		270
TOTAL	465		465
TOTAL OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS			
	8,832	2,670	11,502

(Source: Children's Administration Data Management Unit)

Note: The total number of children served in placement on Table 2 includes children in the sole or shared custody of DCFS and excludes guardianships. There is approximately a 7% duplication included in the total children placed, because a child can be placed in more than one type of placement during a month.

III. Initiatives

Families for Kids Recruitment Resources

In July 2002, CA allocated \$150,000 to Families for Kids Recruitment Resources for a state-wide expansion of its foster parent recruiters, and an additional \$50,000 was provided directly to Tribes for recruitment of Native American foster homes.

Expand Resources for Permanent Placement Options

CA plans to expand resources and develop new permanent placement options for hard-to-place and troubled children by:

- Developing foster families as permanency planning resources;
- Increasing supports to foster parents;
- Cultivating career foster parents – initiate a feasibility study to move from foster parents as volunteers to professionals; and
- Establishing permanency wraparound teams for children in care more than a year who are not in a home where they can remain until age 18.

IV. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

Strengths

- The Foster Care Improvement Plan (FCIP) seeks to increase the number of available foster and adoptive homes through effective recruitment and retention efforts and by creating an agency culture that promotes collaboration between foster families and social workers. CA has licensed between 250 and 350 new minority homes each year over the past three years and 1,240-1,330 total new homes each year over the past three years.
- Family Group Conferences and Family Support Meetings, offered in some CA offices, are a helpful means to ensure that an adequate relative search has been conducted and that the child has been placed in the least restrictive setting. Relative placements have increased from 27.3% in FFY 2000 to 32% in FFY 2002.

- The Foster Care Assessment Program (FCAP) is a service aimed at providing in-depth assessments of children in care and evaluating long term needs. The assessments may be helpful in identifying barriers to permanency and moving the child's current caregivers toward a decision on providing a permanent home for the child(ren).

Challenges

- Despite efforts to secure more relative placements, less than 33% of the children in out-of-home care are currently placed with their relatives.
- Financial support for relative caregivers is available through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Relative caregivers frequently report the need for more financial assistance for the children in their care. Caregivers indicate that the child-only grant is inadequate, and they continue to need help providing basic necessities as well as accessing medical care, affordable housing, and adequate transportation in order to be able to care for their relatives' children.
- With recent foster care recruitment efforts, there has been an increase in the number of available foster homes statewide. However, there continues to be a need for additional homes to meet the needs of the children in out-of-home care.

4. Discuss the extent to which children in care are moving safely into permanent living arrangements on a timely basis and issues affecting the safe, timely achievement of permanency for children.

I. Overview

CA has made a number of system improvements to address the safe and timely permanency for children in care. These improvements include new tools for reunification assessments and safety planning, in addition to court improvement pilot projects to obtain better defense representation for parents and to decrease continuances.

Court delays have been found to be linked to the timely achievement of permanency for children. A court improvement pilot project found that continuances were reported in approximately 55-58% of the hearings scheduled (across all juvenile courts and types of hearings: shelter care, fact-finding, review, termination trials). The average length of the continuances was from less than two weeks to eight weeks. These continuances have had a direct result on the timely achievement of permanency for children. (Refer to Chapter Two: Case Review System for additional information and data surrounding the court influence on this factor).

II. Program and Policy Information

Social workers are required to meet timelines for identifying and implementing permanency plans for all children in foster care when return to parents has not occurred by the ninth month of placement.

The social worker must work towards reunification before any other permanent plan is identified. If reunification is not possible in the foreseeable future, the social worker must implement an alternate permanency plan at the earliest possible date. Concurrent planning – that is, planning simultaneously for the child to return home and for an alternate permanent plan - begins early in the case planning process. Concurrent planning is a part of the competency based curriculum provided to all new social workers in CA's Training Academy, and is part of the court order at the permanency planning hearing.

When a child is placed in out-of-home care, the social worker provides the court with a written primary and alternate permanency plan to secure a safe, stable and permanent home for the child as soon as possible, but no later than by the first permanency planning hearing (within 12 months of the child's placement) or, in the case of aggravated circumstances, at the dispositional hearing. The permanency plan must identify one of the following arrangements as a primary goal and may identify additional arrangements as alternative goals.

The following plans are considered permanent legal arrangements and are ranked in order of preference:

1. Return home to a parent, guardian or legal custodian,

2. Adoption,
3. Guardianship, and
4. Permanent legal custody with someone other than the parent.

Other planned arrangements may include:

1. Long term relative placement,
2. Long term foster care placement with written agreement, and
3. Independent living at age 18, if appropriate.

Consistent with the court order, the social worker's attempts to achieve the primary or alternative plan must not prevent reunification efforts when the parents are involved. When a plan other than return home, adoption, guardianship or permanent custody is selected as the primary plan, the social worker must identify the compelling reason why the other plan is in the best interest of the child.

Data Trends

Reunification

The percentage of children reunified with their parents in less than one year has remained higher than the national standard of 76.2% over the last three years. According to the Washington Child and Family Service Data Profile, CA achieved a reunification rate of: 83.5% in FFY 2000, 83.0% in FFY 2001, and 80.2% in FFY 2002.

This slight decrease in FFY 2002 may be related to the decreasing number of children who are placed for less than 60 days, as reflected in Table 1, below. The number of children placed for short periods (less than 60 days) has declined from 5,416 in FY 1997 to 3,611 in FY 2002. The number of children entering care has also declined. This may be due to efforts being made by CA to keep children from entering into care and improving safety planning in their homes.

Table 1. Placements Greater and Less than 60 Days in Duration

	Total New Placement Entries During the Year	Placements Lasting Less Than 60 Days		Placements Lasting Longer Than 60 Days	
FY 1997	9,644	5,416	56.2%	4,228	43.8%
FY 1998	9,262	4,728	51.0%	4,534	49.0%
FY 1999	8,732	4,149	47.5%	4,583	52.5%
FY 2000	8,402	3,818	45.4%	4,584	54.6%
FY 2001	8,645	3,925	45.4%	4,720	54.6%
FY 2002	8,225	3,611	43.9%	4,614	56.1%

(Source: Children's Administration Data Management Unit)

Safety in Permanency

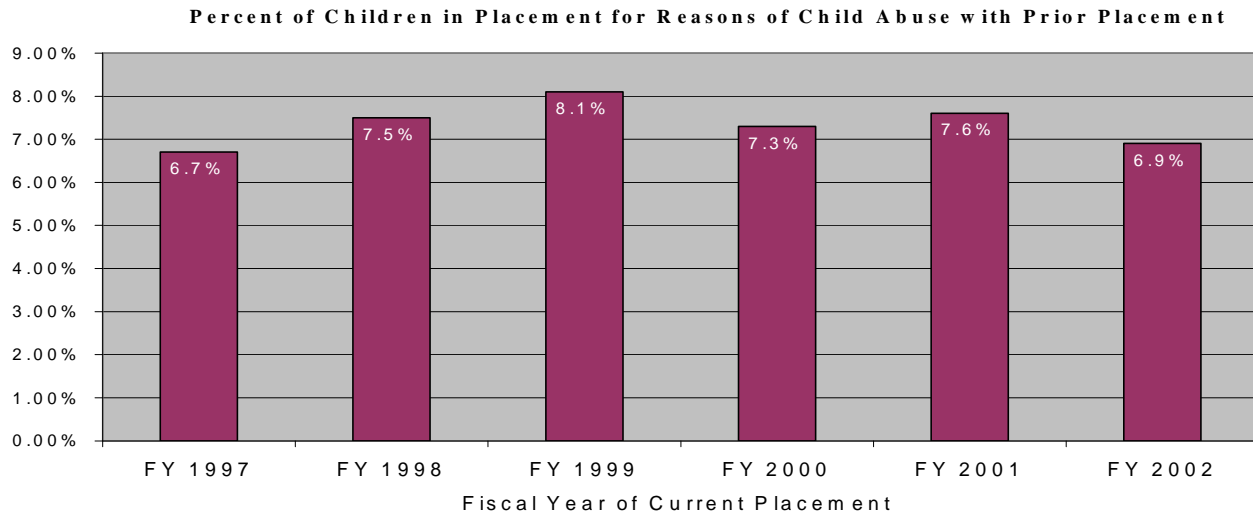
Although CA is meeting the national standard in the area of reunification, the rate of children re-entering care has grown between FFY 2000 to FFY 2002. According to the data profile, 12.4% of children previously placed re-entered care in 2000. This number increased to 15.3% in FFY 2002.

The federal calculation, as reported on the data profile, includes any entries over a 24-hour time period. In CA, when a child is reunified with their caregivers, it is a common practice to offer respite care for that child while the family is continuing to work on the case plan. Respite care can provide a number of supports to a child and family and is a very reasonable service provision for children returning home from out-of-home care. However, when a child is reunified and then is placed in respite, each respite placement is documented as a placement episode and therefore show in the information system as new entry into care. Each time the child uses respite longer than 24 hours, it is being calculated as a re-entry and exit. Due to the current means of documenting this information into CAMIS, it is difficult to determine what placements are due solely to respite, and what placements are true re-entries. This is another issue that has been identified and will be looked at during the revisions to the Legal and Placement module of CAMIS.

In an attempt to better understand the real issues affecting the children re-entering care, CA additionally tracks re-entry of children slightly different than the Washington Child and Family Services Data Profile. CA tracks the percent of children who are originally placed for reasons of child abuse and/or neglect, who are reunified with caregivers and who re-enter care again for reasons of child abuse and/or neglect (verses behavior problems, runaway, etc).

In addition, the placements are considered re-entries only if they are placed for longer than 72 hours in duration. This time period is intended to correct for data errors that may be caused by the inclusion of children in respite care, as well as those children who are placed in protective custody by law enforcement. Since a shelter care hearing is required at 72 hours, placement is decided at that time. In this alternate state measure, a child who remains longer than the 72-hour timeframe is considered a re-entry. This measurement is essentially referred to as the CPS placement re-entry rate. The CPS placement re-entry rate is reflected in Chart 1, for FY 1997-2002. (Refer to Question 9 of this section for additional information on this issue).

Chart 1. CPS Placement Re-entry Rate 1997-2002



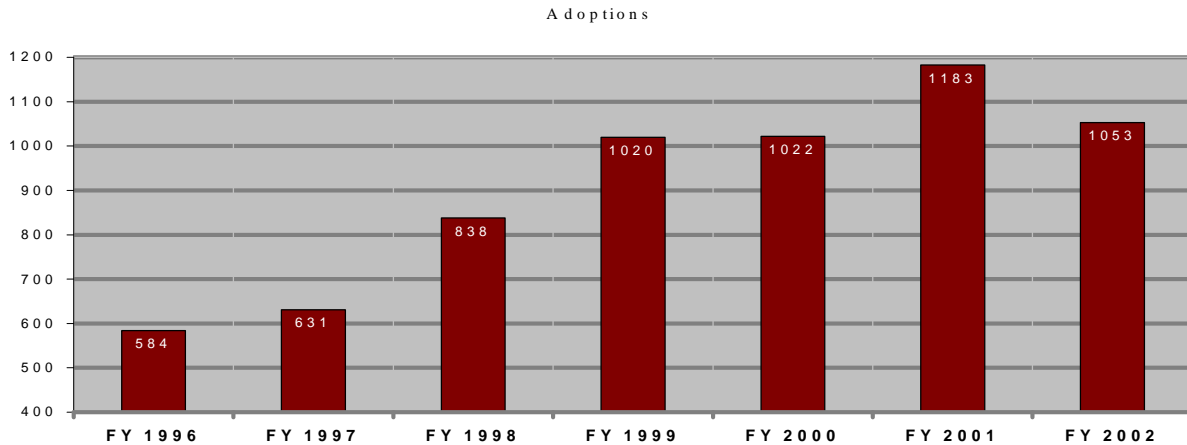
(Source: Children's Administration, Performance Report, 2002)

As of March 2003, the CPS re-entry rate was at 7.0% as of March 2003, which is well below the national standard of 8.6% for re-entry. Although the federal re-entry rate and the CPS placement re-entry rate tracked by CA are not entirely comparable, due to some differences in calculation method used for the CPS re-entry measure (as noted above), the state measure more specifically tracks safety in reunification. The state's overall re-entry rate is 15.3%, according to the federal data profile, which would normally raise serious questions about the safety of children who are reunified. The CPS re-entry rate, as calculated by CA, is a good indication that the state is more successfully focusing on the safety of children who are reunified than the federal measure would indicate.

Permanency Goal of Adoption for Children in Care

The number of children adopted has increased, as reflected in Chart 2, from 1022 in FY 2000 to 1053 in FY 2002. This continues a trend that began in the late 1990s. In 1998, 838 adoptions were accomplished, up 207 from the previous year. This increase is thought to be due the increased focus by CA on finalizing adoptions for children who are legally free. (Refer to Question 6 of this chapter for additional information on the issue of adoptions).

Chart 2. Rate of Adoptions from FY 1996 to FY 2002

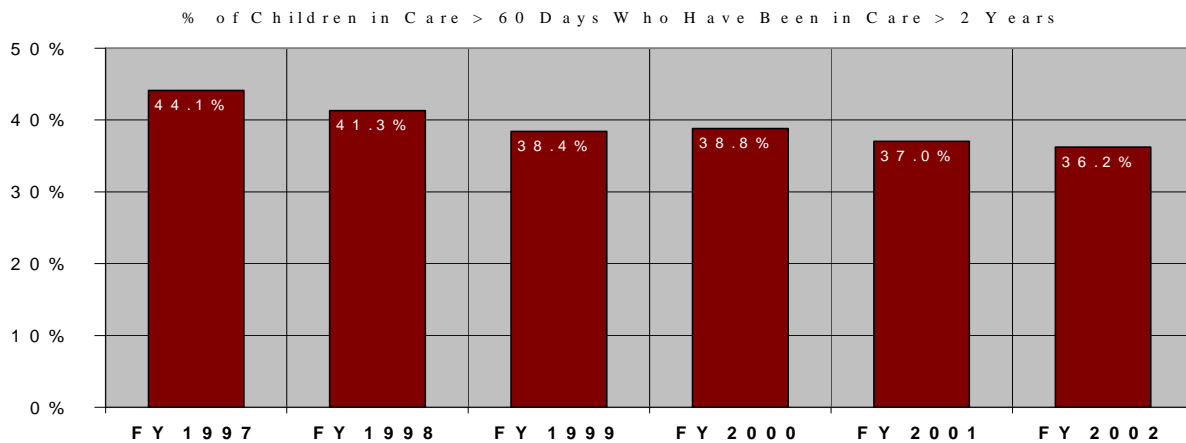


(Source: Children's Administration, Performance Report, 2002)

Percent of Children in Care More than Two Years

The percent of children in care for more than two years has declined from 44% at the end of 1997 to 36% at the end of 2002. During this same period, the median length of stay for children in care more than 60 days has also declined: from 644 days at the end of FY 1997 to 531 days by June 2002. This is reflective of efforts made by CA to move children safely into their permanent living arrangements on a timely basis.

Chart 3. Percent of Children in Care More than Two Years



(Source: Children's Administration, Performance Report, 2002)

III. Initiatives

Select Committee on Adolescents in Need of Long Term Placement

The state *Select Committee on Adolescents in Need of Long Term Placements* has recently completed a report assessing the current barriers to serving youth with multiple issues, such as lack of permanent connections, lack of housing, substance abuse, and mental health issues. Workgroups are meeting to develop plans to carry out the recommendations identified in the report.

Family Home Study Project

A workgroup is in the process of developing a Unified Home study for approving families for relative care, foster licensing and adoption. The home study is to be used jointly by DLR and DCFS. The goal is to improve practice and decrease the duplication of home studies on the same family as they change their status.

Supportive Services

In order to increase permanency for children in out-of-home care, CA is targeting services to support dependency guardianship, long-term foster care with relatives/foster parents, third-party custody and independent living by:

- Developing a policy clarifying when to pursue each type of permanent plan;
- Developing a policy clarifying minimum agency services to be provided for each type of permanent plan;
- Educating caregivers and birth parents on their roles in making choices regarding permanent plans for children;
- Developing supportive tools such as written long-term foster care agreement content;
- Developing methods to track each type of plan completion in CAMIS (long-term foster care with relatives and foster parents, third-party custody and independent living); and
- Targeting services toward completing permanency for adolescents.

Kids Come First – Reunification Assessment and Transition and Safety Plan

Kids Come First – Reunification Assessment

The Reunification Assessment is a tool used by social workers to help identify conditions within a family that have significantly changed so that safe reunification may occur. The purpose of the Reunification Assessment is to:

- Assess risk of harm due to CA/N if child is reunified;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of service plans in reducing risk;
- Assess caregiver's capability to parent the child;

- Assess the impact of reunification on child and family;
- Structure the decision making process for reunification; and
- Provide rationale for reunification decision.

Kids Come First – Transition and Safety Plan

The results of the Reunification Assessment are used in developing the Transition and Safety Plan. In particular, the Safety Plan should specifically address any high risk factors that were identified as concerns on the Reunification Assessment. The transition arrangements should specifically focus on the needs of the family and child as identified in the service plan in the Individual Service and Safety Plan (ISSP).

The Transition and Safety Plan is to be developed in collaboration with the parents and the individuals that will be providing support to the family. Family meetings that provide for shared decision-making, such as family group conferences or family support meetings, can provide an opportunity to develop a mutually agreed upon Transition and Safety Plan.

The purpose of the Transition and Safety Plan is to:

- Identify current safety needs for the child;
- Identify current protective factors for the child;
- Minimize trauma to child;
- Address child's needs;
- Consider safety issues;
- Support the parent towards a successful reunification; and
- Support the overall success of the reunification.

IV. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

Strengths

- CA has achieved an average reunification rate (in less than twelve-months from the time of placement) of 85% over the past five years.
- The development of the Kids Come First tools (e.g. the Reunification Assessment and Transition and Safety Plan) has assisted workers in planning for permanent placements for children.

Challenges

- Washington is not meeting the national standard regarding children adopted within 24 months of becoming legally free. According to the data profile, Washington is at 26.6% in FFY 2002, as compared to the national standard of 32%.

- Across all juvenile courts and types of hearings (shelter care, fact-finding, review, termination trials) continuances were reported in approximately 55-58% of the hearings scheduled. The average length of the continuance was from less than two weeks to eight weeks.

- 5. Discuss whether the state's data regarding achievement of reunification within 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home conforms to the national standards for this indicator. Identify and discuss issues affecting conformity and how the state is addressing the issues.**

I. Overview

Washington State law mandates that a child be reunified with his or her parents or legal guardians when to do so is deemed safe and in the best interest of that child. Despite an emphasis upon pursuing reunification, and the fact that the state is currently achieving reunifications at a rate which exceeds the national standard, the number of children reunified with their parents or guardians has continued to decrease over the past six years. This trend is reflective of the larger national trend. Anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that the decline in reunifications may also be related to the increasing number of parents who are allowing relatives to care for their children.

CA is currently exceeding the national standard for reunification within 12 months, with 80.2% of children in placement being reunified in FFY 2002. During the same period of time, the percent of children re-entering care did not meet the national standard. For FFY 2002, 15.3% of children re-entered care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode, as compared to the national standard of 8.6% or less. (Refer to question 9 of this section for additional information on the issue of children re-entering care).

II. Program and Policy Information

When removal of a child from his or her home is necessary, CA social workers attempt reunification before seeking any other permanent plan. Washington policies and services support reunification and ensure that, if the child is reunified with his/her family, the child is returned to a safe and stable environment. As part of the Kids Come First Action Agenda, a Reunification Assessment is completed on every family prior to reunification and a safety plan is established. Community Child Protection Teams (CPT) review all cases of children under the age of six prior to reunification.

When possible, placements are chosen near a child's family in order to aid in reunification. Visitation is addressed in the first court order and reviewed at least every six months. Other services that have an affect on reunification are:

- The use of Home Support Specialists, paraprofessionals who provide in-home assistance to parents;
- The use of Family Group Conferences to get the extended family involved in decision making and to make plans to support the parents when the child is returned home; and
- The use of Family Preservation Services and Intensive Family Preservation Services. Both services are family-focused, behavior-oriented, in-home counseling and support programs.

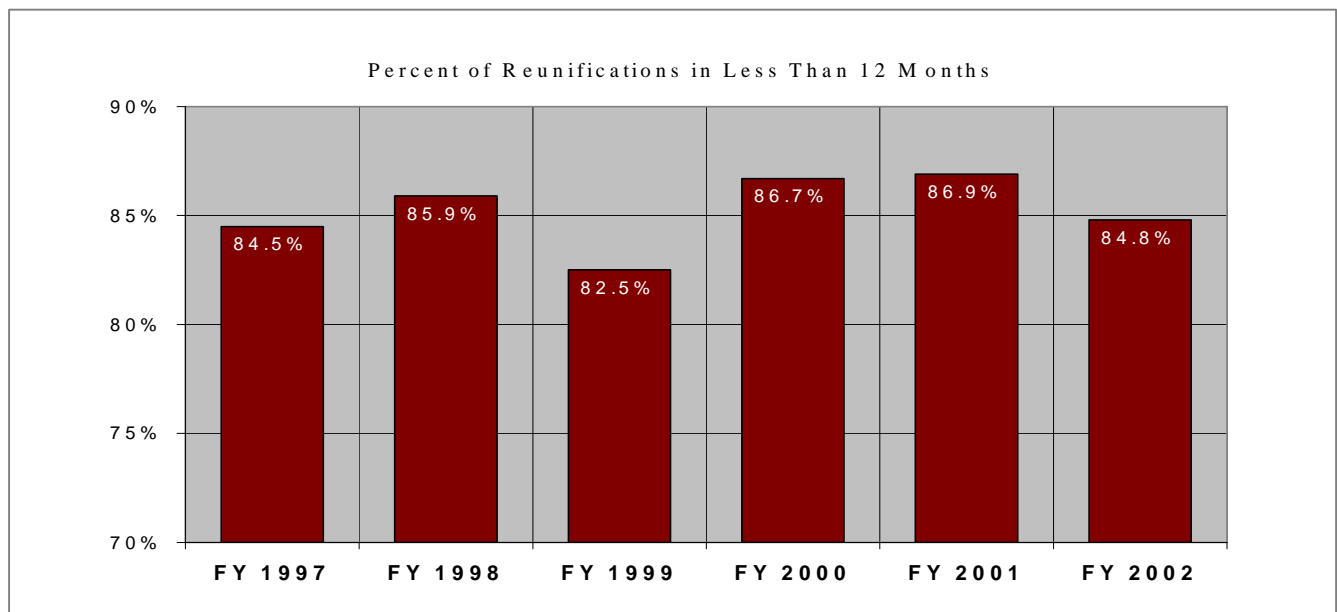
These services are used when the child is at imminent risk of placement or returning to the home from out-of-home care.

Data Trends

Percent of Reunifications

The State of Washington exceeds the national standard of 76.2% for children reunified within 12 months. Based upon the data profile for FFY 2002, 80.2% of children were reunified within 12 months from the time of removal from their home. Based upon state data between FY 1997 and 2002, Washington has exceeded 82% on this standard. Chart 1 reflects the fiscal year numbers, versus the federal fiscal year, as provided in the Washington Child and Family Services Data Profile.

Chart 1. Percent of Children Reunified in Less than 12 Months



(Source: *Children's Administration, Performance Report, 2002*)

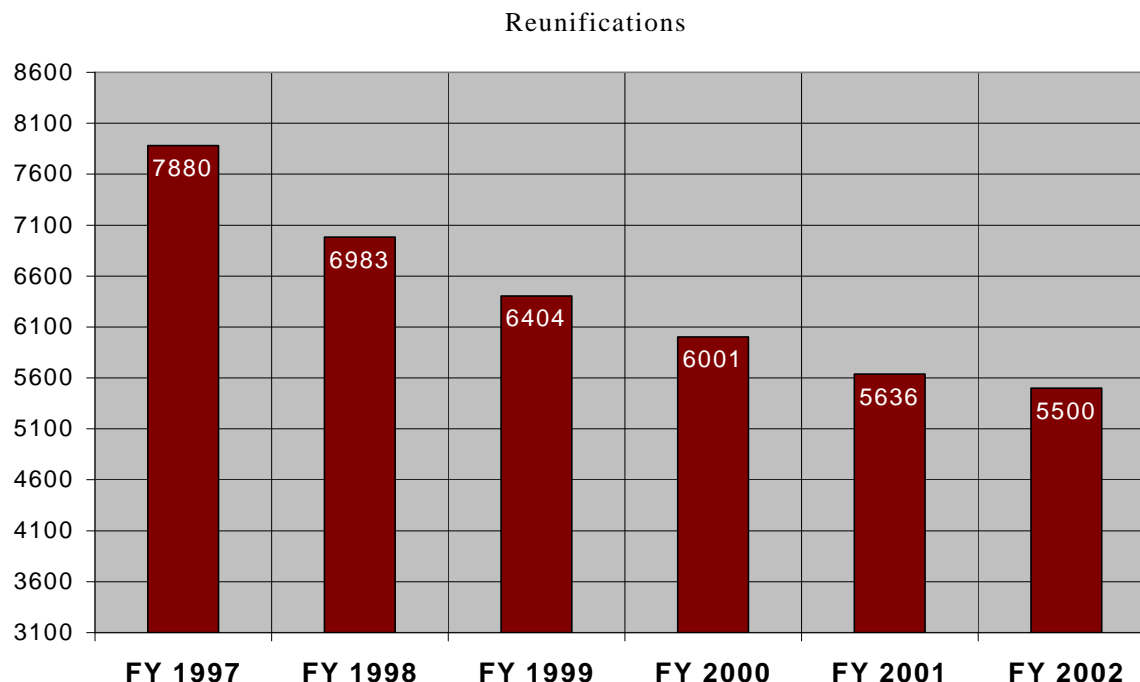
The majority of these children were reunited with their families within the first 60 days of placement. Since the federal measure includes children with all lengths of stay, the large number of short-term placements in Washington significantly affects this measure.

Reunification Trends

Although CA is currently exceeding the national standard for reunifications, there is an overall decrease in the reunification trend over the past six years. As noted previously, this may be due

to the increase in parents allowing relatives to care for their children, in addition to the increase in the number of children moving into adoptive placements. As noted in the chart below, of children placed in out-of-home care who were reunified with their parents during the fiscal year, there has been a decrease of 2,380 reunifications over a six year period.

Chart 2. Reunifications from FY 1997 to FY 2002



(Source: *Children's Administration, Performance Report, 2002*)

Placement Demographics

Another factor that may have an affect on reunification is the length of placement. Children in short placements (less than five days) are at least 30 times more likely to reunify than children in longer-term placements. The demographics described in Chart 3 illustrate the differences in children who are placed for short periods from those who are placed longer than 60 days for whom permanency planning continues. The difference in age between the two groups is quite apparent from the chart, with a higher percentage of the short-term placements being older adolescents. This is believed to be a result of the adolescent programs available in the state which emphasize family reunification from the very beginning. Many of these adolescents are placed for reasons other than child abuse and neglect, such as family conflict or behavioral problems.

The percentage of infants who are placed for less than 60 days (10.5% of all children placed for less than 60 days) is notable. Over 300 infants in FY 2002 were placed for this short period, for which the reasons are unclear. Typically, it would be expected that most young children who are placed are at high risk and must remain in care longer than 60 days. This is a change from previous years where only seven percent of the children placed for less than 60 days were infants.

Chart 3. Washington State Placement Demographics

		WA	PLACEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS**		
		General Child Population Age 0-17*	All Children in Placement	In Placement <= 60 Days	In Placement > 60 Days
CATEGORY	DEMOGRAPHICS				
AGE	Infants	5.0%	6.6%	10.5%	5.4%
	Age 1-3	16.0%	20.4%	14.1%	22.4%
	Age 4-7	22.0%	20.0%	14.3%	21.9%
	Age 8-11	23.0%	17.5%	14.0%	18.6%
	Age 12-14	17.0%	15.6%	20.9%	13.8%
	Age 15-17	17.0%	17.1%	25.9%	14.3%
	Age 18		2.7%	0.3%	3.6%
GENDER	Male	51.0%	50.9%	46.0%	52.5%
	Female	49.0%	49.1%	54.0%	47.5%
RACE/ ETHNICITY	Hispanic	11.7%	12.1%	12.3%	12.0%
	Native American	2.1%	7.7%	5.2%	8.5%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	5.6%	1.5%	2.2%	1.2%
	African American	3.9%	11.5%	9.6%	12.1%
	Caucasian	75.8%	67.0%	66.9%	67.1%
	Other	5.9%	4.1%	5.6%	3.7%
	Unreported	0.0%	1.4%	4.5%	0.4%
	Multi-Racial	6.8%	6.7%	6.0%	7.0%

(Source: US CENSUS 2000, Washington children ages less than 18)

(PLACEMENT DEMOGRAPHIC age is based on age at end) of FY2002

III. Initiatives

Visitation Projects

Visitation is important to maintain parent/child bonds, and to work towards reunification. Many regions in the state have visitation contracts with private providers. In Region 6, a work-group entitled No Bars on Permanency is working with correctional facilities to help strengthen ties between incarcerated parents and their children in out-of-home care. A 2002 Reasonable Efforts Symposium in King County identified inadequate parent-child visitation as a huge bar-

rier to family reunification. A task force was set up to examine the issues of removing barriers to visitation, developing best practices in visitation protocols and guaranteed visitation within 48 hours of placement.

Parent's Representation Pilot Project

The Dependency and Termination Parents' Representation Pilot Project in Pierce and Benton-Franklin counties has had positive results in the past two years. (This is discussed in more detail in the Case Review Chapter). Counting only reunifications after six months or longer in out-of-home care, the reunification rate was 57%, and was higher at the end of the project than at the beginning. Core components of the project include additional attorney and paralegal staff and additional training for attorneys.

Kids Come First – Reunification Assessment, Transition and Safety Plan and Reassessment of Risk

Refer to Question 4 of this section for additional information on the Reunification Assessment, and Transition and Safety Plan assessments/tools.

The Reassessment of Risk is the sixth step in risk decision making and answers the question, "Have risk levels changed?" The Reassessment of Risk contains the same 16 risk factors as the Investigative Risk Assessment (discussed further in Chapter Eight: Safety). The purpose of reassessment of risk is to:

- Identify specific changes in current risk factors in comparison to the identified previous risk factors in the investigative risk assessment;
- Accurately assess current risk of child maltreatment;
- Draw appropriate conclusions of current overall risk based on data, observations and interviews;
- Compare current protective factors to protective factors in the investigative risk assessment;
- Assist social workers in evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention; and
- Apply the results of the reassessment to case planning.

III. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

Strengths

- In FFY 2002, according to the federal data profile, 80.2% of children were reunified with their parents within 12 months of placement in out-of-home care (exceeding the 76.2% required by the national standards).
- The Kids Come First assessment tools, specifically the Reunification Assessment and Transition and Safety Plans, have assisted social workers in developing plans for reunification and assessing risk.

Challenges

- The current policy as it pertains to reassessment of risk is restrictive. CA has a process and tool in place to conduct a reassessment of risk. However, the tool is not required following reunification, so it is unknown what affect, if any, this would have on the rate of children re-entering care following reunification.
- Although the state is currently exceeding the national standard for reunification, the overall trend is reflective of a decrease in the rate of reunifications for children in care. The reasons for this are not well understood.

- 6. Discuss whether the state's data on children exiting foster care to a finalized adoption within less than 24 months from the latest removal from home conforms to the national standard for this indicator. Identify and discuss issues affecting the number of children placed for adoption in the state and how the state is addressing the issues.**

I. Overview

The national standard for completion of adoptions is 32%. According to the federal data profile, Washington's performance on this measure was 19.7% in FFY 2000, 26.1% in FFY 2001 and 26.6% in FFY 2002. Although CA has made improvements over the last three years in this area, the number of completed adoptions does not meet the national standard.

II. Program and Policy Information

Permanency for every child at the earliest possible date is a high priority. If the permanent plan is to not return the child to a parent's home, then an alternate plan must be identified and implemented by the social worker within the timeframes mandated by the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). Adoption provides a child with the greatest legal security for connection to a family.

Registration with the Washington Adoption Resource Exchange

If a child is legally free for adoption and a permanent placement has not been identified, the child is registered with the Washington Adoption Resource Exchange (WARE) and the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE). Referral to WARE occurs within 30 days of termination of parental rights. Other regional and local consortia and state, regional and national adoption exchanges are also utilized.

Adoption Planning Reviews

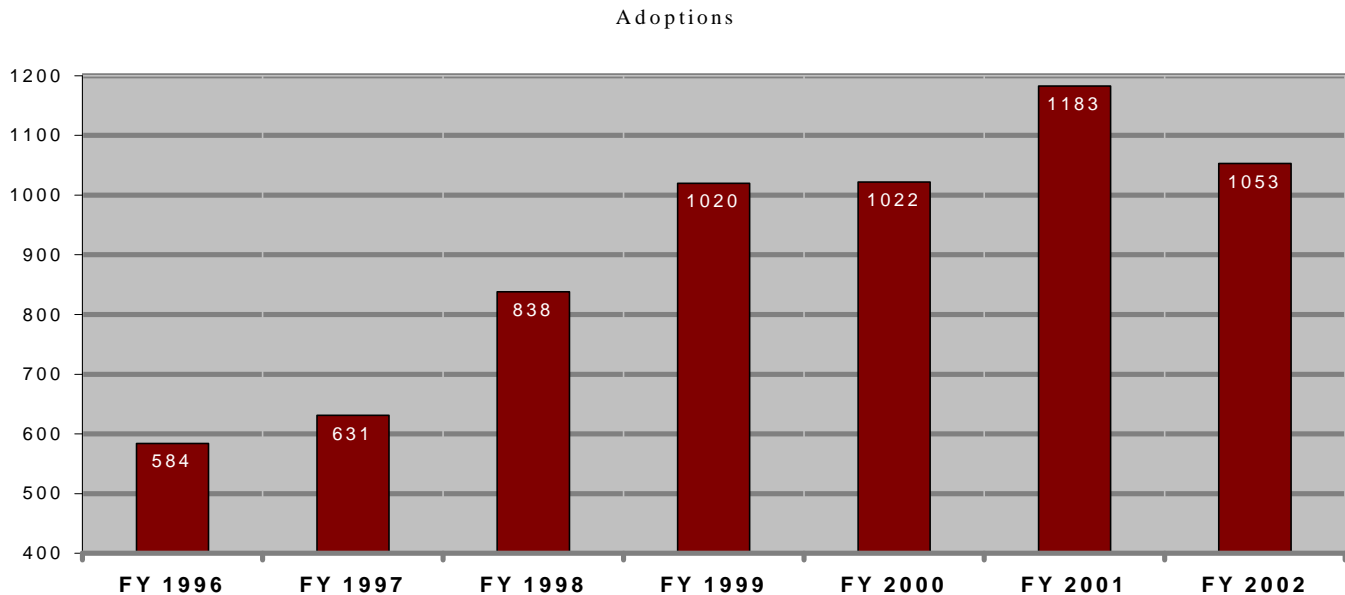
DCFS conducts two adoption-planning reviews on behalf of each child for whom termination of parental rights is being sought or has been achieved. The initial Adoption Planning Review takes place within 30 days of the referral for termination of parental rights. The second Adoption Planning Review takes place within 30 days of the order to terminate parental rights.

Data Trends

Completed Adoptions

Washington has increased the number of adoptions from 584 in FY 1996 to 1,053 in FY 2002, an increase of 80%. Over the past seven years, 6,331 children have been adopted, demonstrating an increased emphasis on adoptions for children who are legally free. In recognition of the increased number of adoptions finalized in 2001, the CA was awarded an \$858,419 Federal Adoption Incentive Award.

Chart 1. Number of Completed Adoptions from FY 1996 to FY 2002



(Source: *Children's Administration, Performance Report, 2002*)

Although overall there has been an increase in the number of adoptions, between 2001 and 2002, there was a slight decrease. This may be due to a downturn in the economy of the state. Federal law has offered a tax incentive for parents adopting, beginning in 2003. Some potential adoptive parents decided to postpone finalizing adoptions until after January 2003 in order to benefit from these incentives. Despite the slight decrease in 2002, the number of completed adoptions still exceeded all other previous years and continues an upward trend that represents an increase of more than 80% since FY 1996.

In spite of the state's progress on timely adoptions, significant barriers to improvement on this measure still exist:

- Adoption support payments are frozen in time. Some potential adoptive parents may opt to continue as foster parents or become dependency guardians so they do not experience a decrease in funds available to care for the child;
- Court delays, continuances, length of appeals and backlogs contribute to the delay in timely adoption finalizations; and
- There are sometimes barriers within the home of choice: the identified family may be ambivalent about adoption or there may be issues or other concerns that need to be resolved before the adoption is finalized.

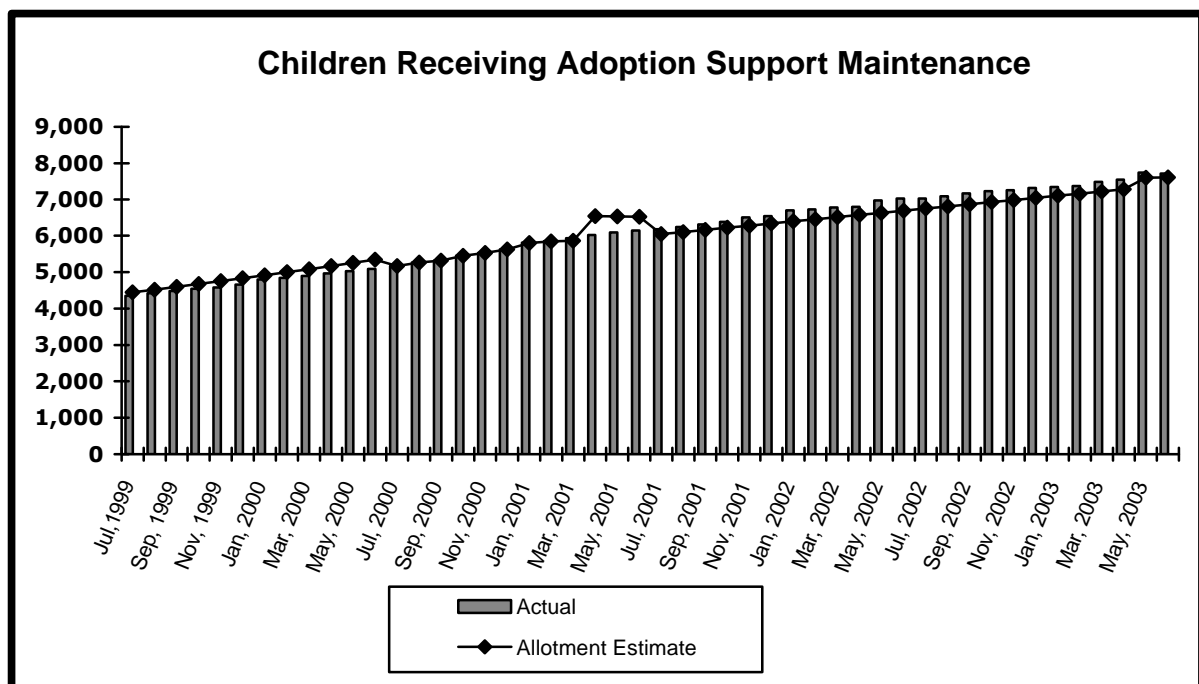
CA continues to improve in the area of establishing permanent plans for children in care and moving children into their identified permanent placement. As of June 1, 2003, there were 1,907 legally free children statewide. Of the 1,907 legally free children in placement, 1,015 (or 53%) were in their identified permanent placement. CA continues to work on recruitment efforts statewide to find appropriate permanent placements for children who are legally free.

Adoption Support Program

The Adoption Support Program in Washington state has grown substantially in the past five years, from just over 3,000 children in FY 1998 to nearly 8,000 in FY 2002. This change has been due, in part, to the Tokuda bill, passed by the Washington state legislature in 1996. This bill removed financial barriers to adopting special needs children and led to a big increase in adoptions.

Chart 2, below, is reflective of the rate of increase in adoption support maintenance, and the allotment estimate from July 1999 through April 2003. As discussed on the previous page, adoption support payments are frozen over time.

Chart 2. Children Receiving Adoption Support Maintenance



(Source: Children's Administration, Program and Fiscal Review, August 5, 2003)

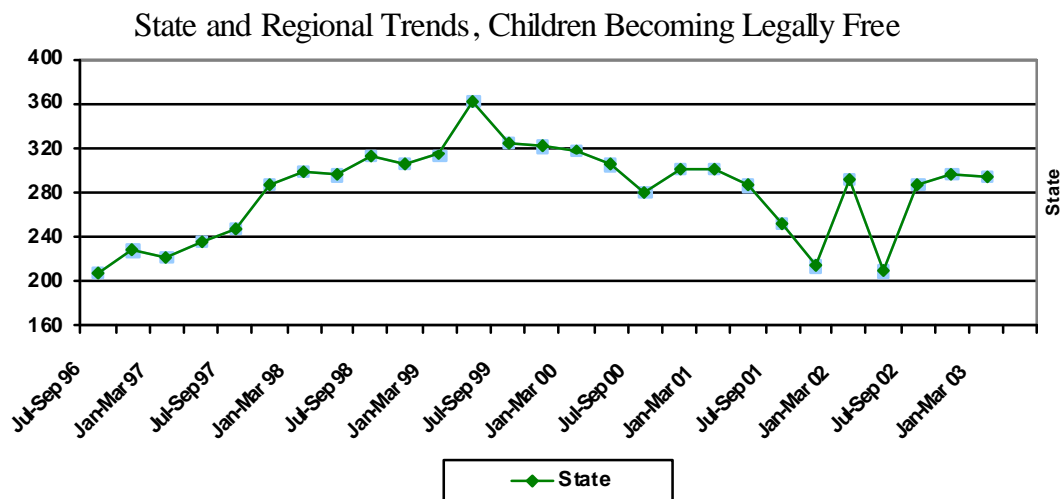
III. Initiatives

Database Listing of Legally Free Children

A database listing all legally free children was developed in FY 2002 to support regional efforts to achieve permanency for legally free children and is updated at least semi-annually. The database and accompanying spreadsheet is sent to each region and provides a way for regions to identify the children who have been legally free for the longest period of time. Social workers and supervisors can more easily address barriers to permanency, as they are able to quickly identify those children who need special attention.

Chart 3 reflects the number of children becoming legally free each month ranges from 200 to 300. The legally free database assists social workers in managing the planning for the children who are newly legally free and for those who have been waiting for a permanent home.

Chart 3. Legally Free Children



(Source: Children's Administration Data Management Unit)

Recruitment Efforts

Since October 2001, the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE) has been working with six private adoption agencies and DCFS to recruit adoptive families for special needs children who are waiting for families. The contract allows NWAE to do a more comprehensive search for an appropriate adoptive home based on the needs of the child. During the first two years of the contract a total of 82 children were identified to be in the project. As of August 2003, all but 31 of the children have been placed into permanent adoptive homes. Five of the children were determined that long-term foster care was the more appropriate plan, due to the special needs of

the children, the stability with their current care providers, and the commitment of the care providers to maintain the children in placement but do not wish to adopt.

Foster Care Assessment Program

The Foster Care Assessment Program (FCAP) is a multidisciplinary contract between CA and Harborview Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress Center to assess the needs of children who have been in out-of-home care for more than 90 days. One of the goals of this program is to identify and help resolve obstacles to adoption or other permanent plans. (Refer to Chapter Ten: Child and Family Well-being for additional information on this program).

Adoption Incentive Funding

CA is eligible for federal adoption incentive funds, which started in FFY 1999. These funds are paid on a yearly basis to CA if the number of foster child adoptions finalized during the federal fiscal year exceeds the baseline established for that year. The year with the highest number of adoptions since the beginning of the grant is the baseline number of adoptions we need to exceed. CA's baseline is currently 1207 adoptions.

The incentive money may be used for any activity or service that is allowable under Title IV-B or Title IV-E of the Social Security Act (SSA) and requires no matching state funds. These funds can buy services related to moving children towards adoption, such as hiring staff to facilitate finalizations and complete home studies, providing additional Assistant Attorney General support, purchasing equipment to assist in recruitment, completing life books, and training.

CA has utilized some of the Adoption Incentive funds to hire specific staff to work with adoption cases. This has led to an increase in children being adopted and a decrease in the time needed to complete the adoption.

IV. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

Strengths

- Over the past seven years, 6,331 children have been adopted, demonstrating an increased emphasis on finalizing adoptions for children who are legally free.
- In recognition of the increased number of adoptions finalized in 2001, CA was awarded an \$858,419 Federal Adoption Incentive Award. Regions have used the money to increase staffing in the area of adoptions.
- Since October 2001, the Northwest Adoption Exchange has been working with six private adoption agencies and DCFS to recruit adoptive families for special needs children who are waiting for families.

- The Foster Care Assessment Program (FCAP) is a multidisciplinary contract between CA and Harborview Center Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress to assess the needs of children who have been in out-of-home care for more than 90 days. One of the goals of this program is to identify and help resolve obstacles to adoption or other permanent plans.

Challenges

- CA does not meet the national standard of 32% for adoption completion. According to the federal data profile, CA's performance on this measure was 19.7% in FFY 2000, 26.1% in FFY 2001, and 26.6% in FFY 2002.
- Between 2001 and 2002 the number of has decreased slightly. This may be due to a downturn in the economics of the state. The federal government is offering tax incentives for parents adopting after January 2003. Potential adoptive parents have, in many cases, decided to postpone finalizing adoptions in order to benefit from these incentives.

Promising Practice

The CA Strategic Plan 2003-2009 reflects CA's commitment to permanency for children, through an increase in adoptions. This will be sought by:

- Increasing adoptions by increasing the number of children registered with the Washington Adoption Resource Exchange
- Implement Family Home Study for relative and foster parent adoption
- Determine need for increases in staff to process adoption support applications.

- 7. Discuss the extent to which the state complies with the requirement regarding the termination of parental rights for children who have been in foster care 15 of the most recent 22 months, for abandoned infants, and for children whose parents have been convicted of the listed felonies. Identify and discuss the issues that affect timely termination of parental rights, where appropriate, including the use of the exceptions to the TPR provisions.**

I. Overview

The CA statewide information system has limitations in the area of tracking how the state complies with the requirement to file a termination of parental rights for children who have been in foster care for 15 out of the recent 22 months. As stated in previous sections of this assessment, the Legal and Placement module will be going through some improvements in order to be able to track some of this information more consistently. In order to determine how the state complies with this requirement, CA tracks the time from the opening of the original placement date (OPD) and the date that a termination of parental rights (TPR) is granted. As noted below, the state averaged 22.2 months from the date of the original placement to the date of termination of parental rights in 2001.

II. Program and Policy Information

Washington State law requires that if a child has been in out of home care for 12 out of the past 19 months, a petition to terminate parental rights must be filed unless there are compelling reasons not to terminate parental rights. This means that by the first permanency planning hearing, the state must present concurrent permanent plans to the court, one of which (unless there are compelling reasons not to) is termination of parental rights.

Compelling reasons not to file terminations of parental rights includes, but are not limited to:

- Reasonable efforts have not been made to return the child to the legal parents;
- The Tribal/State agreement defines the child as Indian and the child's involved tribe or Canadian First Nation does not concur with the filing of the petition or with adoption as the permanency plan for this child and an alternate plan is in child's best interest;
- The parents are making significant progress in addressing the problems that brought their children into care and the social worker expects reunification within six months;
- The child resides with relatives and the relatives have agreed to be a permanent placement resource but have made an informed decision that they do not wish to adopt the child; or
- A permanent plan of adoption is not in the child's best interest. Such a child may be one who:

- ⇒ Is older and is opposed to adoption as a permanent plan, following a discussion with the social worker of the alternatives;
- ⇒ Has significant, positive ties to the extended family, which are expected to be on-going, that would be disrupted by termination of parental rights;
- ⇒ Is in placement for reasons other than abuse, neglect, abandonment, or no parent able or willing to care for the child (e.g. children in care due to the risk they pose to others, due to behavioral management issues, etc.);
- ⇒ Does not have a permanent placement resource identified and for whom there is significant risk that an adoptive resource will not be found; or
- ⇒ Has other unique characteristics or circumstances that constitute a compelling reason not to file a petition to terminate parental rights.

A petition to terminate parental rights and forego reunification services may also be initiated when aggravated circumstances exist. Aggravated circumstances, as defined by law, include felony crimes, conviction of sex offenses and abandonment. In these cases, CA asks the court to make a finding of aggravated circumstances and order termination of parental rights. A permanency planning hearing occurs within 30 days of the finding of aggravated circumstances.

Data Trends

Original Placement Date (OPD) to Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)

As reflected in Chart 1, below, the regions' average length of time from TPR to adoption finalization decreased between 3.1 to 8.9 months over the past 5 years. Statewide in 2001, the length of time from OPD to TPR was 22.2 months; from TPR to adoption was 15.2 months. The average length of time from OPD to TPR has stayed fairly consistent at 22 months since 1999.

Termination of Parental Rights to Adoption

The average time from TPR to adoption decreased from 17 months in 2000 to 15 months in 2001. However, half these adoptions were completed within 11 months of their TPR date.

Chart 1. Average Lengths of Time from OPD to TPR and TPR to Adoption Finalization

Data from 2001

Region	OPD to TPR	TPR to Adoption
1	18.2 months	9.6 months
2	19.8	14.1
3	24.4	10.4
4	23.8	22.5
5	21.4	14.3
6	19.5	7.8
State	22.2	15.5

(Source: Washington Permanency Report 2002, Families For Kids Partnership)

African American children experienced a one-month increase in the time to TPR and approximately a three-month decrease in TPR to adoption. The total length of time from TPR to adoption is still about eight months longer for African American children than for Caucasian children. The time to TPR for Native American children decreased by five months to 24 months in 2001.

Chart 2. Length of Stay in Months for TPR to Adoption Finalization and OPD to TPR
Breakout by Race, 2001
Length of Stay in Months

	Hispanic*	Multiracial (n=76)	Asian (n=14)	Native American (n=65)	African American (n=170)	Caucasian (n=805)	All Children (n=1189)
TPR to Adoption Finaliza- tion	17.3	15.9	18.5	19	20.9	13.2	15.2
OPD to TPR	21.3	21.2	31	23.6	24.8	21.7	22.2

*Hispanic children are included in the other race categories (primarily Caucasian), N=160. The Multiracial category was added in 2001.

(Source: Washington Permanency Report, 2002 – cited Children’s Administration, April 2002)

Terminations

Terminations opened as a percentage of dependencies has nearly doubled (from 20% to nearly 40%) since 1995, according to data from the Office of the Attorney General, indicating that a growing proportion of children in care have been made legally free since 1995. Several barriers to more timely terminations of parental rights remain:

- The availability of public defenders to take termination cases;
- Difficulty in scheduling court time for termination trials because of court backlogs in some regions of the state; and
- The lack of available adoptive homes for older children.

III. Initiatives

Regional Efforts Symposia

Each region conducts an annual Reasonable Efforts Symposium to focus on ways to improve regional practice and provide reasonable efforts to families. The symposiums are funded

through the Court Improvement Plan (CIP) grant, and have resulted in the development of several new projects throughout the state to improve the services on a local level. The Drug Court program that began in Thurston County was initiated during a Reasonable Efforts Symposium. Drug Court was started when both the courts and CA agreed there was a need and both committed personnel and funding to make it work.

IV. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

Strengths

- The average length of time between out-of-home placement to termination of parental rights was 22.2 months for the year 2001.
- Each region conducts an annual Reasonable Efforts Symposium to focus on ways to improve regional practice and provide reasonable efforts to families.

Challenges

- CA's statewide information system has limitations in the area of tracking how the state complies with the requirement to file a termination of parental rights for children who have been in foster care for 15 out of the most recent 22 months.

8. **Discuss whether the percentage of children in the state who have been in foster care less than 12 months and have had more than two placement settings conforms to the national standard for this indicator. Identify and discuss the reasons for the movement of children in foster care in the state. If there are differences in placement stability for children newly entering the system compared with the total population of children in care, identify and discuss those issues.**

I. Overview

Multiple placement changes in a child's life often precipitate a decrease in a child's sense of belonging and self-esteem and may jeopardize their future success. In an effort to reduce placement changes, CA tracks the number of times a child must move while he or she is in out-of-home placement.

II. Program and Policy Information

Washington policy and law require the least restrictive setting available be used for placement to provide for a child's stability, consistent with the safety and best interest of the child. This means that if the child cannot be maintained in his/her own home, relative placement is looked at first, then out of home placement in a family setting (receiving care, foster family care, or therapeutic/treatment foster care with live-in house parents). The social worker develops and chooses placements that are designed to provide stability and permanence for the child. Multiple placements are considered not to be in the best interest of children or their families. Utilizing short term receiving care does not violate this principle.

Staffings/Case Reviews

Periodic case review hearings in the juvenile court look at the appropriateness of placement. In addition to court review hearings, which occur at least every 180 days, the State of Washington also utilizes the shared decision making framework through the use of a variety of staffings. Staffing opportunities may include prognostic staffings, community Child Protection Team (CPT) staffings, 30-day staffings and other case staffings, as needed.

Kidscreen

In September of 2001, Washington state initiated the Kidscreen Program. Each child entering out-of-home care is screened in five domains – physical, developmental, family/social, educational, and emotional/behavioral – within the first 30 days of placement. This information is then used to link the child with needed services, and match the child with a family who can best meet his or her needs whenever possible. This is difficult to do since the child is already in placement when the screening is occurring. By providing services to the child, the placement could be strengthened and stabilized. (Refer to Chapter Ten: Child and Family Well-being, for additional information).

Safeguard to unnecessary moves

Safeguards exist to prevent unnecessary moves once a child is in out-of-home care. Parents are notified or involved in decision making about changes in placement. The court is also involved when there is a placement change. When a child has resided in a foster family home for at least 90 consecutive days, the foster parents are notified at least five days prior to moving a child to another placement. Exceptions to this policy are limited to occasions when a court order requires immediate change, when the child is being returned home, when the safety of the child is in jeopardy, or when it involves a move out of a receiving home or group home.

There are systems in place to provide additional safeguards to a child for unnecessary moves in care. CA provides supportive services to placement providers in an attempt to prevent a placement from disrupting (e.g. Family Preservation Services, Child Care, etc). CA also has a policy which requires social workers to conduct face-to-face contacts with children in their placement every 90 days. The meetings are designed to discuss and address any health and safety concerns for the child and provider.

Braam Lawsuit

On May 31, 2002, the Whatcom County Superior Court entered an injunction in *Braam v. State*, a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Washington's foster care system. This case is often referred to as the multiple placement lawsuit.

The case is now on appeal to the Washington State Supreme Court and the court has "stayed" most of the provisions of the injunction while the case is on appeal. However, one section of the injunction was not stayed and remains in effect. Section IV of the injunction orders that the department "shall cease to hold foster children in unsafe and clearly inappropriate placements."

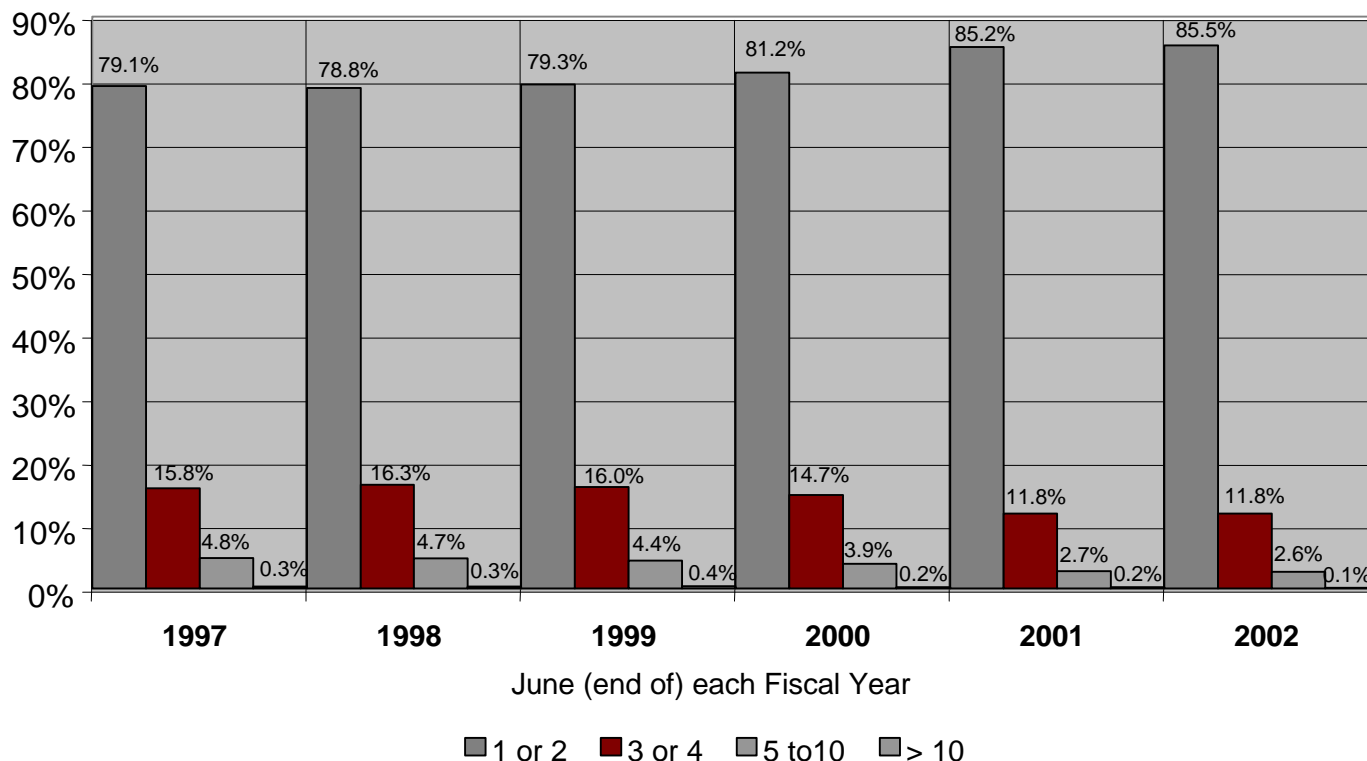
The *Braam* case is a class action lawsuit and the effective terms of the injunction apply only to children in the class of plaintiffs who brought the lawsuit. Those plaintiffs are foster children who are, or are about to be, placed in a third or subsequent placement during their current placement episode while in DSHS custody.

Data Trends

Stability of Placements

While still slightly under the national standard of 86.7%, the State of Washington continues to improve in the number of children in out-of-home care who have two or fewer placements within 12 months. In FY 1998, Washington had a 79.6% rate; it increased to 82.8% in FY 2000, and to 85.5% in FY 2002. This number excludes respite care, juvenile detention, hospital stays, and on-the-run episodes, all of which are separately coded in CAMIS.

Chart 1. Percentage of Children in Care Greater than 60 Days with Various Numbers of Placement Events



(Source: Children's Administration, Performance Report, 2002)

As is evident by Chart 1, the largest percentage of children in care greater than 60 days had one to two placement episodes, according to FY data. (Refer to Question Two of this section for additional information on the number of children who are returned home within the first 60 days of placement). This clearly shows that those children who enter into care are not experiencing multiple placement issues within their first 12 months of placement.

An additional look at the data from the federal data profile reveals a large number of children who have been in care longer term, with placements of six or more placement settings within the current placement episode. In FFY 2000, there were 1,530 children who had been in six or more placements during their current placement episode. In FFY 2001 this number was 1,506, and in FFY 2002 the number of children was 1,513. The number of children with six or more placements has remained relatively stable over the past three years, although the number is large. Many of these placements are older children with complex needs, who are using respite as part of their in-home services. (Refer to question 9 of this section for additional information on this issue).

Multiple Placement Review

CA formed a workgroup in the fall of 2002 to review multiple placement issues and to develop recommendations for more effective interventions with this population of youth in order to decrease multiple placements.

The workgroup used several sources of information to develop recommendations. These included a previously completed comprehensive literature review on this issue (February 2002) and a current in-depth review of 64 cases of children with multiple placements and long lengths of stay in out-of-home care. Both sources of information were both provided to the workgroup by the Office of Children's Administration Research (OCAR). In addition, the Quality Assurance Case Record Review Unit conducted an in-depth record review of 18 cases of children with the highest number of multiple placements. The 18 cases reviewed had a range of 16-74 placement events when detention, hospitalization, and running away are counted. The median number of placements for the sample was 44 placements.

Note: A placement episode begins from the time a child enters out-of-home care until their exit from out-of-home care. Within each episode a child may be placed in different homes and each placement move would be considered a different event.

Summary Statistics of Multiple Placement Review

In March 2002, there were a total of 10,644 children in care:

- **458 (4%)** had never been in a relative, foster or group care placement event (they were in one or more of the other possible placements such as: hospital, CRC, Detention or In-Home Dependency and are excluded from this analysis)
- **5,996 (59%)** had not had a prior placement episode
- **4,190 (41%)** had been in one or more prior placement episodes
- **7,466 (73%)** had been in four or fewer placement events, though 2,440 of these had been in two or more placement episodes
- **2,720 (26%)** had been in five or more events

The workgroup determined that slightly more than a quarter of these children had been in five or more placements. Of the children who have been in five or more placements, a substantial percentage of them have also been in out-of-home care for longer than two years. African American children were more likely to experience multiple placements than Caucasian children.

Children Ages 12-18

A large percentage of these children first entered foster care/group care at young ages (0-11 years). As might be expected, children aged 12-17 represents nearly 50% of the children who have been in five or more placements. This age group also has the highest percentage of 1-2 placements within 12 months (28.5% of the total). These children typically manifest mental

health problems which may include: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or Conduct Disorder. Their placement history reflects increasingly aggressive and/or assaultive behavior as they become older and more difficult to manage. The placement history of these children usually includes both juvenile detentions and psychiatric hospitalizations. For youth from 12-18 years of age, the most frequent reasons for placement changes include: licensing issues, run away, abused in foster care, assaultive or violent behavior, foster parent request, and child behaviors.

Children Ages 6-11

For children from 6-11 years of age, this review determined the most frequent reasons for placement changes to be: child behavior, foster parent request, licensing issues, and foster parent abuse and/or neglect.

The record review of 18 cases, by the Case Review Unit, revealed several commonalities within the case scenarios.

- The children tended to enter into out-of-home care after child protective services had extensive contact with the family over a long period of time.
- The children have often been chronically neglected and often physically abused and/or sexually abused as well.
- There were often issues with long-term substance abuse of the parents, as well as parental incarceration.
- The parents of these children tended to have serious mental health problems and a history of domestic violence.
- The child is often given one or more various mental health diagnoses (FAS, PTSD, ADHS, conduct disorder).
- The child's social worker changes frequently, as do mental health therapists and teachers.

The Multiple Placement workgroup reported that CPS practice with chronically maltreating families needed to devote far more attention to the cumulative emotional/developmental harm experienced by young children in these families. Earlier interventions by CPS social workers on behalf of chronically maltreated children, either through legal action or developmentally focused voluntary services, were indicated. In addition, the workgroup reported that there appeared to be a correlation between the stability of social worker contact/involvement in a case and the effectiveness of the agency practice with behaviorally troubled children/youth in out-of-home care.

Select Committee on Adolescents in Need of Long Term Placement

To take a closer look at the issue of adolescents in need of long term placements, DSHS Secretary Dennis Braddock formed a special committee to look at this issue. The committee was titled *The Select Committee on Adolescents in Need of Long Term Placement*. The committee consisted of division representatives, providers, judges, and others with expertise on this issue.

The committee conducted a series of meetings with parents, youth, attorneys, caseworkers, and providers to discuss the difficulties in services for youth and families with multi-needs. In addition to the meetings, over 150 individuals were interviewed across the state. The committee gathered the information and made recommendations for improvements in this area.

The committee report was published in December 2002. DSHS responded in detail to the recommendations in a report issued February 2003. The department invited committee members, other community professionals, parents, foster parents and youth to participate in three workgroups to improve service delivery to this population:

- The first workgroup worked with Behavioral Rehabilitation Service (BRS) providers and developed agreements across regional boundaries to ensure placement resources for those youth who have the most difficult needs.
- The second workgroup, still in progress, is working with the Washington Association of Family Based Treatment Services (WAFTS) to research existing treatment foster care models in other states as well as successful projects in this state. The goal is to develop a system-wide model for treatment foster care.
- The third workgroup, which will commence work soon, will study Alternate Response System models to look at the possibility of developing a dual track CPS investigation/assessment response for use in Washington.

III. Initiatives

PRIDE

PRIDE, a foster parent training curriculum, was implemented beginning in June 2002, and is designed to prepare foster parents for dealing with problems facing foster children. (Refer to Chapter Four: Staff and Provider Training for additional information).

Foster Care Improvement Plan

CA is overseeing and implementing a Foster Care Improvement Plan over the next three years in order to promote a culture that embraces collaboration between foster families and social workers, increases supports for foster care and increases foster home retention, recruitment, training, supervision and diversity. (Refer to Chapter Seven: Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval and Recruitment for additional information).

Kidscreen

On September 15, 2001 the state of Washington implemented the Kidscreen program to address the long-term needs of children in foster care through the implementation of a standardized, validated approach to assessing children within the first 30 days of placement. An action plan is

developed based on the needs identified in the assessment and that plan is incorporated into the child's ISSP. This information is then used to link children with needed services, and assist in making placement choices and supporting existing placements. (Refer to Chapter Ten: Child and Family Well-being for additional information).

Increasing Kinship Placements

National research shows that relative placements are more stable than foster care. Currently in Washington, one third of children in out-of-home placements are placed with relatives. Increasing kinship placements in the state is a goal for the next three years. Some of the proposals to accomplish this include:

- Collaborating with Economic Services Administration to investigate options to enhance support for relative caregivers;
- Developing new supports for kinship care placements with certification and financial supports outside the licensing system;
- Increasing the emphasis on relative search for all children in placement;
- Examining policies for consistency with the Council on Accreditation (COA) relative and kinship standards, and developing and implementing a plan to meet those standards;
- Recognizing and collaborating with community groups representing relatives; and
- Statewide Information System enhancements to track long-term foster agreements with relatives.

IV. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

Strengths

- CA has a number of processes in place to study the issue of placement stability. Processes include: Select Committee on Adolescents in Need of Long Term Placement, Multiple Placement Workgroup, and Case Record Review.
- The Foster Parent Improvement Plan has been developed to help promote collaboration between foster families and social workers, increase supports for foster parents and increase foster home retention, recruitment, training, supervision and diversity.

Challenges

- CA does not meet the national standard for this element of placement stability and continues to improve on this measure. The national standard is 86.7% or more and CA is currently at 83.3% according to the federal data profile, March 2002.
- According to CA data, children that enter into care are not experiencing multiple placement issues within the first 12 months. Rather, those children that are in care longer term tend to

have an increased number of placements. Children aged 12-17 represents nearly 50% of the children who have been in five or more placements.

- 9. Discuss whether the percentage of children who entered foster care during the period under review who had a prior entry into foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode conforms to the national standard for this indicator. Discuss the extent of foster care re-entries for all children in the state's placement and care responsibility, the issues affecting re-entries, and how the state is addressing the issues.**

I. Overview

Ultimately, children and families are not well served if reunification occurs before the family is stabilized and the adults are able to safely parent their children. Washington has been focusing on safe and stable placements for some time, although that is not readily evident in the re-entry rate. This raises concerns about both data and practice.

II. Program and Policy Information

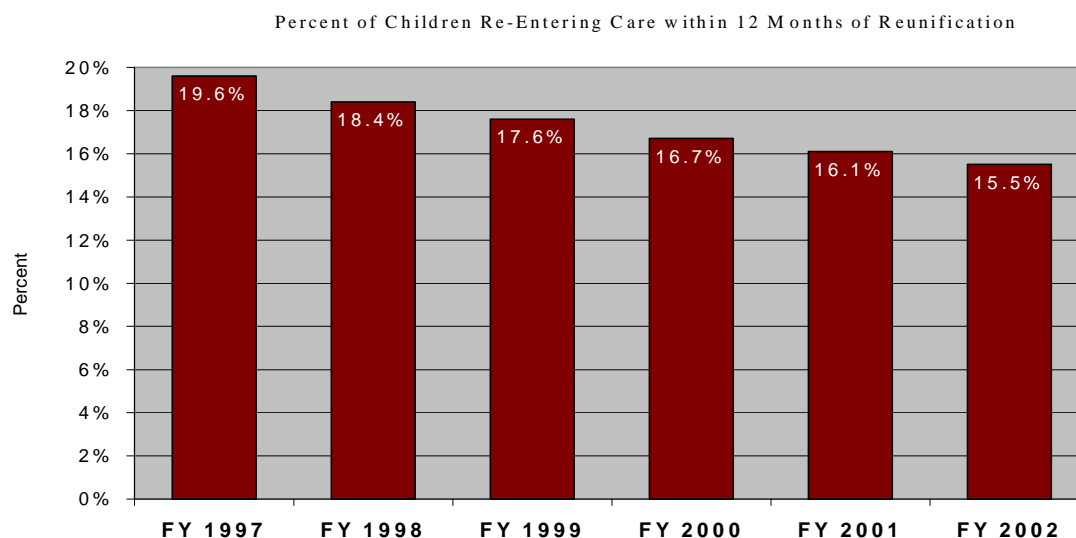
In 2001, CA developed a Reunification Assessment, and Transition and Safety Plan tools, which are designed to help social workers in decision making about when and under what circumstances to return children to their parents.

In-home dependencies are a means of continuing to provide intensive services to a child and family while in the process of reunification. Although there continues to be a dependency ordered by the court, the child is returned to the care of the parents with court ordered conditions. CA has strict policy guidelines as to contact and supervision by the department for children placed on an in-home dependency. The policy outlines visitation requirements by the social worker, which vary by the age of the child. In addition, the policy requires a safety plan be developed with the family and monitored by the social worker.

Data Trends

Washington does not meet the federal standard of 8.6% for the percent of children who re-enter foster care within one year of reunification. The data profile indicates that 12.4% of children re-entered care in FFY 2000, 16.2% in FFY 2001, and 15.3% in FFY 2002. An extensive review of this data identified some issues in how placements are coded in CAMIS and some major impacts of policy, leading us to conclude that much of the data used to calculate this measure may be incorrect and/or non-comparable to other state's data. Chart 1 is reflective of fiscal year data from 1997-2002. The chart reflects the decrease in children re-entering care over the six year time period.

Chart 1. Percent of Children Re-entering Care within 12 Months of Reunification



(Source: *Children's Administration, Performance Report, 2002*)

Impact of Respite Care on Data

The Washington Child and Family Services Data Profile identified 62 children with six or more removal episodes (five or more re-entries into care). Generally, these children were adolescents who were being maintained in their own homes through the use of intermittent respite. Because they returned home after each placement in short-term respite care, each respite was correctly documented as a new removal episode. However, it appears that some states pay for short-term respite as part of their in-home services in a different manner and do not actually place these children in out-of-home care. Washington's practice in this area certainly has an impact on the comparability with the calculation of the national standard. (Refer to Question 4 of this section for additional information on this issue).

Impact of Guardianship Statute on Data

When a guardianship is dissolved, the child is moved to another foster home. This appears to have an impact on the re-entry rate. Washington State has a unique dependency guardianship statute, which is very much like long-term foster care, but does not likely compare to the re-entries from other states which is used to calculate the national standard. This is documented in CAMIS as though the child re-entered care from a reunification, although the child actually moved to another foster home from the guardianship home, not from the parental home. From a practice perspective, CA recognizes that any type of placement move is a disruption.

In-Home Dependencies

Another factor impacting the state's re-entry rate is the policy related to in-home dependencies (See Program and Policy Information section). All children who return home in Washington are required by statute to be returned by the court with a minimum six-month in-home dependency period of supervision. While the CA is mandated to supervise the in-home dependency placement in the home, the child cannot be removed from the parent without another court order. For this reason, the in-home dependency time period is not considered a trial home visit, as it is in many states.

Children who are returned to foster care from their parent's home during a *trial home visit of up to six months in duration* are *not* considered a re-entry into care. Conversely, children who are returned to foster care from their parent's home during an *in-home dependency placement of any duration* are considered a re-entry into care. The CA Data Management Unit is doing some work to attempt to identify the impact of this policy difference. Over half of the children who re-enter care in Washington State do so within the first six months following reunification. Therefore, if Washington were to calculate re-entry considering in-home dependencies in the same way that other states consider trial home visits, the re-entry rate would be well below the national standard.

Re-Entry Verses Re-Abuse

Washington clearly has some unique policy and data-entry issues impacting the re-entry rate; however, we are very concerned about any re-entry into care where a child suffers re-abuse. As a result, we have been measuring re-entry using both the federal calculation and using a state measure that looks at the percent of children who are placed for CPS reasons and who return to care for CPS reasons, or essentially a CPS placement re-entry rate. The CPS re-entry rate is currently 7.0%, well below the national standard of 8.6%, although the two measures are not entirely comparable due to some differences in calculation method used for the CPS re-entry measure. However, the CPS re-entry rate is a good indication that the state is more successfully focusing on the safety of children who are reunified than the federal measure would indicate. It also supports the state's findings that many of the re-entries into care are related to the services that the state provides to adolescents and their families and to the difference in the treatment of in-home dependency cases as compared to trial home visits. (Refer to Chart 1, CPS Placement Re-entry Rate 1997-2002, from question 4 of this section).

III. Initiatives

Kids Come First Safety Plan, Transition and Safety Plan, and Reunification Assessment

The Kids Come First tools, specifically the transition and safety plan and reunification assessment are designed to assist the social worker in providing appropriate supportive services to meet the needs of the family when a child is reunified. These tools are explained in detail in Chapter Five: Service Array and Development.

IV. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

Strengths

- The new Reunification Assessment, and Transition and Safety Plan tools are designed to assist social workers in the decision making process about when and under what circumstances children can safely be returned to their parents.
- The use of Family Group Conferences and Family Support Meetings can result in the development of a plan that will support the family and increase safety before and after reunification.

Challenges

- Washington does not meet the federal standard of 8.6% for this foster care re-entry. According to the federal data profile, Washington's performance for FFY 2000 was 12.4%, 16.2% in FFY 2001 and 15.6% in FFY 2002.
- The inclusion of respite care in this measure makes Washington's figures less comparable to those of other states and the national standard.

Promising Practice

Children's Administration Strategic Plan (2003-2009) includes numerous strategies to decrease the re-entry rate:

- Complete research and recommendations to improve policy and to reduce the re-entry rate.
- Evaluate characteristics of children re-entering care.
- Integrate recommendations with policy and practice changes.
- Explore increased funding for supervised visits to support reunification.
- Develop practical model to increase support to birth families after reunification.

CA is working towards improvements in the Legal and Placement module of CAMIS. These improvements may have an impact on data collection in the area of respite care, guardianship, and in-home dependencies.

10. Discuss how length of stay in foster care for first-time foster care entries in the state compares with the national standard for this indicator (although this indicator is not used to determine substantial conformity). Examining the data on length of stay, identify and discuss factors affecting length of stay in foster care and how the state is addressing the issue. If there are differences in the length of stay between children newly entering foster care in the state and the total population of children in care, identify and discuss the reasons.

I. Overview

CA has tracked the length of stay of children in out-of-home care and as a result has been tracking the number of children in care more than two years and the median length of stay of children in care. CA is unaware of a national standard related to length of stay for first time foster care entries, as mentioned in the above question, and subsequently are not able to compare Washington's length of stay to a national standard.

II. Program and Policy Information

Washington State has policy around a child exiting care through reunification and adoption. WAC 388-25-0018 further sets a goal for the overall population of children in out-of-home care as follows: "The placement goal for the foster care program is to limit the number of all children who remain in care in excess of twenty-four months to no more than thirty-five percent of the foster care population."

Data Trends

The median length of stay for children first entering care ranged from 0.2 months in FFY 2000 and FFY 2001 to 7.2 months in FFY 2002 in the federal data profiles. This increase in the median length of stay for first time entries is most likely related to the state's increasing success in preventing short-term placements whenever possible. The effort to prevent placements and the resultant impact on the median length of stay of first time entries is also shown in the declining total number of children who enter care each year and the declining number of children who are placed for less than 60 days.

The number of children placed for less than 60 days has declined from 5,416 in FY 1997 to 3,611 in FY 2002. This decline is the result of preventing placement, as indicated by Table 1, below. The chart is reflective of a fairly stable number of children who enter care and stay for more than 60 days. Between 1998 and 2002, the number of children entering care for more than 60 days increased by only 1.7% (4,534 in 1998 to 4,614 in 2002). The change in Washington State's first-time entries into placement can be attributed almost entirely to the decline in short-term placements.

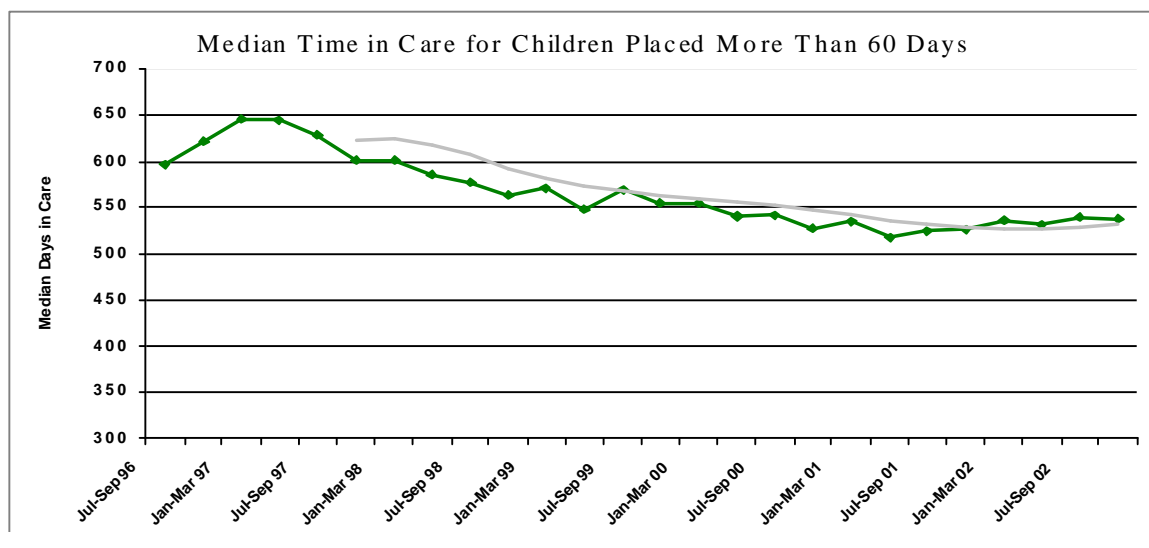
Table 1. Number of Children in Placement

	Total New Placement Entries During the Year	Placements Lasting Less Than 60 Days		Placements Lasting Longer Than 60 Days	
FY 1997	9,644	5,416	56.2%	4,228	43.8%
FY 1998	9,262	4,728	51.0%	4,534	49.0%
FY 1999	8,732	4,149	47.5%	4,583	52.5%
FY 2000	8,402	3,818	45.4%	4,584	54.6%
FY 2001	8,645	3,925	45.4%	4,720	54.6%
FY 2002	8,225	3,611	43.9%	4,614	56.1%

(Source: Children's Administration Data Management Unit)

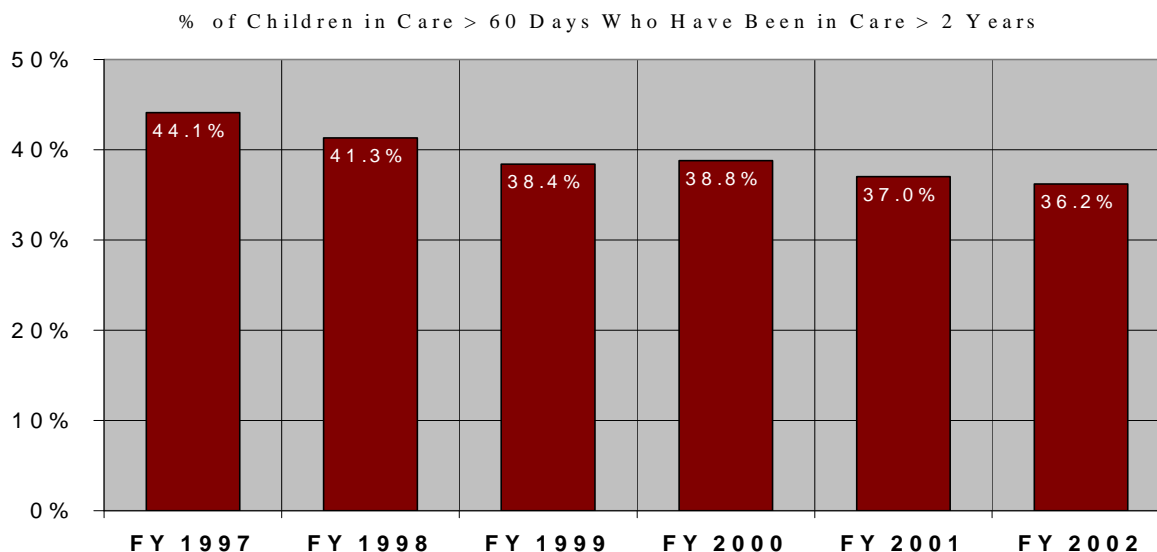
The declining percent of children who are placed for short periods is expected to continue as CA continues to find additional ways to support children in their own homes so they do not have to be placed for short periods.

As shown above, the median length of stay is impacted in large measure by the many short-term placements in Washington. Therefore, the CA has been tracking the median length of stay for children placed more than 60 days, as reflected in Chart 1, below. Children in care more than 60 days require focused on-going permanency planning efforts in order to impact the length of time they remain in care. The median number of days in care for this group has decreased overall since we began tracking this in 1996, but has remained relatively flat since 2000.

Chart 1. Median Time in Care for Children in Placement Greater than 60 Days

(Source: Children's Administration Data Management Unit)

Chart 2. Percent of Children in Care



(Source: Children's Administration, Performance Report, 2002)

The percentage of children reunified with their parents in less than one year has remained higher than the national standard of 76.2% over the last three years: 83.5% in FFY 2000, 83.0% in FFY 2001, and 80.2% in FFY 2002.

This slight decrease in FFY 2002 is most likely related to the decreasing number of children who are placed for less than 60 days. This is an indication that the children who are now being placed into care come from more difficult situations and that it logically takes more time to achieve their permanent plan. The issues discussed in previous sections impacting the time to reunification, adoption and other permanency also impact length of stay and therefore are not restated here.

CA tracks the number and percent of children who remain in care longer than two years, because of the concern for children who remain in care for extended periods of time. As can be seen in Table 2, below, the number of children in care at any point in time for more than two years has remained relatively stable over the last three fiscal years.

The percent of children who have been in care more than two years, of all those in care more than 60 days, has declined from 44.1% in 1997 to 36.2% in 2002. This is a strong indication that the administration has improved in the efforts to achieve timely permanency for a these children.

Table 2. Number of Children in Care

Number of Children in Care for More Than Two Years

As of End of Reporting Period

Region	FY 2001				FY 2002				FY 2003		
	Jul-Sep 2000	Oct-Dec 2000	Jan-Mar 2001	Apr-Jun 2001	Jul-Sep 2001	Oct-Dec 2001	Jan-Mar 2002	Apr-Jun 2002	Jul-Sep 2002	Oct-Dec 2002	Jan-Mar 2003
1	310	315	357	368	362	367	374	417	412	400	392
2	260	255	275	279	268	267	270	288	319	280	308
3	387	373	377	415	406	365	366	359	366	350	392
4	982	921	946	957	937	906	892	876	866	829	799
5	559	547	573	574	562	560	564	556	621	634	648
6	407	407	421	442	456	438	453	442	441	445	407
State	2905	2818	2949	3035	2991	2903	2919	2938	3025	2938	2946

(Source: Children's Administration Data Unit)

While the CA remains concerned about the length of time that children remain in out-of-home care, there has been marked improvement over the past five years on several different measures of length of stay. The percent of children in care for more than two years has declined from 44% at the end of 1997 to 36% at the end of 2002. During this same period, the median length of stay for children in care more than 60 days has also declined, from 644 days at the end of FY 1997 to 531 days by June 2002. In addition, there has been nearly an eight percent decrease in the proportion of longer-staying children in care more than two years between 1997 and 2002.

III. Initiatives

Washington is addressing length of stay at both ends of the spectrum of out-of-home care: by attempting to reunify families as early as possible and, if that is not an option, to move quickly to other permanent plans such as adoption. The specific initiatives for these outcomes have also been addressed in previous sections.

IV. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

Strengths

- The Federal Adoption Incentive award granted CA in 2001 and used to hire additional adoption workers may be having a positive impact on the overall length of stay for children in care.

- The Kids Come First assessment tools are designed to better assess safety and risk and potentially could impact the length of stay in foster care.
- The Permanency Planning Symposiums occurring annually around the state helps focus attention on permanency.
- The Families for Kids Partnership (FFKP) has worked to eliminate the backlog of legally free children waiting for permanent families thereby shortening the time in foster care.
- Permanency Planning and Prognostic Reviews aid in case planning and timely permanence.
- The Foster Care Assessment Program (FCAP) assessments help identify barriers to permanency.
- On September 15, 2001, CA implemented the Kidscreen program to address the long-term needs of children in foster care through the implementation of a standardized, validated approach to assessing children within the first 30 days of placement. An action plan is developed based on the needs identified in the assessment and that plan is to be incorporated into the child's ISSP.

Challenges

- Kidscreens have not been completed on children in care prior to its' statewide implementation in September 2001.
- While data is available in regards to the length of stay in foster care for first-time foster care entries, that data is not readily accessible.

Promising Practice

The use of Drug Courts in some area may be impacting the overall length of time a child is in out-of-home care.